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President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, inspects the China National Archives of Publications and Culture in Beijing on Thursday. He underlined the importance of shouldering new cultural missions and building a modern Chinese civilization at a symposium on cultural inheritance and development at the Chinese Academy of History on Friday. JU PENG / XINHUA

Xi: Build modern Chinese civilization

President says firm up self-confidence in culture, better understand history

By MO JINGXI
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President Xi Jinping on Friday underlined the importance of shouldering new cultural missions and building a modern Chinese civilization.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks at a symposium on cultural inheritance and development at the Chinese Academy of History in Beijing.

He said it is important to firm up self-confidence in culture, adhere to China's own path, use Chinese wisdom to summarize Chinese experience and transform it into Chinese theory in order to achieve spiritual independence and autonomy.

Xi said China's excellent traditional culture has many important elements that jointly shaped Chinese civilization with inherent continuity, unity, inclusiveness and peacefulness.

Noting that Chinese civilization is continuous, Xi said it is inevitable that the Chinese nation will follow its own path, be committed to preserving its traditions without sticking to the past, and be willing to undertake new challenges.

It is impossible to understand ancient China, let alone modern and future China, without an understanding of China's long-standing historical continuity, he said.

The prominent unity of Chinese civilization determines that national unity will always be at the heart of China's core interests and the fate of all ethnic groups depends on a strong and united country, he said.

Xi said different religious beliefs coexist in harmony in China and Chinese culture is open-minded to other civilizations in the world.

He also said that China opposes confrontation, refuses to engage in "small-clique" politics and will never impose its own values and political system on others, and this is determined by the peaceful nature of the time-honored Chinese civilization.

The nation will always be a force for world peace, a contributor to global development and a defender of international order, he said.

Xi also urged efforts to uphold openness and inclusiveness, adapt Marxism to the Chinese context and the needs of our times, carry forward and develop excellent traditional Chinese culture, promote the localization of foreign cultures, and cultivate and build socialist culture with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

According to Xi, combining Marxism both with China's specific conditions and traditional Chinese culture is the most effective instrument for China's success in exploring the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Combining Marxism with traditional Chinese culture demonstrates that the Party has reached new heights in its understanding of the Chinese path, theory and system, and that the Party's confidence in history and culture has reached a new level, he said.

Prior to the symposium, Xi visited the China National Archives of Publications and Culture on Thursday afternoon. He said the construction of the archives center is an infrastructure project for building China into a leading country in culture and also a landmark project that can benefit future generations.

Noting that China now enjoys prosperity, social peace and stability, he said the country is willing to and is capable of carrying forward Chinese civilization, the only uninterrupted civilization in the world, and it must do a good job in this regard.

When visiting the Chinese Academy of History on Friday, Xi emphasized the important role of archaeology in understanding the long history of Chinese civilization and appreciating the richness and profoundness of Chinese culture.

Work must be done to carry out comprehensive studies of the origin and early development of Chinese civilization, implement major archaeological projects and conduct research and interpretation of the origins of Chinese civilization, he said.

Xi also encouraged researchers at the academy to work with their counterparts across the country and contribute their wisdom and efforts to the advancement of Chinese modernization.

Envoy says consensus on Ukraine needs push

By ZHANG YUNBI
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For Li Hui, the special representative of the Chinese government on Eurasian affairs, his recently concluded trip to exchange views with various parties on a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis was no easy journey due to inconvenience in transportation.

From May 15 to 26, Li, the former Chinese ambassador to Russia and a veteran diplomat on Eurasian affairs, visited Ukraine, Poland, France, Germany, the European Union's headquarters and Russia.

This was the first time that China has sent a special delegation to relevant countries to conduct diplomatic work on seeking a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis.

Having no chance to travel directly by train from the Polish capital Warsaw to the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, the Chinese delegation arrived at the two countries' shared border at midnight before "a 14-hour train trip to Kyiv", Li told media from home and abroad at a briefing on Friday in Beijing about the recent trip.

When asked about future steps Beijing will take on tackling the crisis, Li said "China is willing to actively consider sending personnel to relevant countries again to communicate on the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis", and Beijing "is willing to maintain communication with all parties in this regard".

Li Hui

"China will, in light of the development of the situation and the reaction of the international community, decide the direction of its work and concrete initiatives intended for the near future," Li said.

According to recent remarks by Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning, Li's trip took place in order to "have extensive contact and exchanges with various parties on the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis" and to "build up international common understanding".

Speaking on the current situation, Li said, "At present, various parties may still face a lot of difficulties in sitting down at the table to negotiate, talk and get results".

"But it is important that people step forward to push for achieving consensus and the most common ground, and to accumulate and create conditions for the final settlement of the crisis," Li added.

During the recent journey, Li was impressed by the positive responses from various parties — Ukraine, Russia, other European countries, and the EU — toward China's efforts in promoting peace talks.

*See **Trip,** page 3*

RCEP to enhance economic integration

By ZHONG NAN
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The fully implemented Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership pact will significantly enhance economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region and sustain the long-term and stable growth of the global economy, the Ministry of Commerce said on Friday.

The ministry's comments came as the Philippines became the final member to activate the RCEP agreement on Friday, making the mega free trade pact effective for all signatory countries. Under the agreement, more than 90 percent of trade in goods among approved member economies will gradually be tariff-free.

The full-force implementation of the RCEP demonstrates the commitment and actions of all 15 participating countries toward supporting a multilateral trading system that is open, free, fair, inclusive and rules-based, said the ministry, stressing that it will notably elevate the level of trade and investment liberalization and facilitation in East Asia.

The RCEP came into force on Jan 1, 2022. It is a mega free trade agreement involving Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The 15 nations are home to 2.27 billion people with a combined GDP of $26 trillion and total exports of $5.2 trillion, accounting for about 30 percent of global trade in goods.

In another statement released on Friday, the ministry's head of international trade and economic affairs said that the fully implemented RCEP pact will boost China's high-level opening-up to the world.

The official emphasized the importance of ensuring the high-quality implementation of the RCEP, as it will foster the integration of regional industrial and supply chains, unlocking new opportunities for international economic and trade cooperation for localities, industries and companies, as well as facilitate the advancement of higher-level institutional opening-up from an elevated starting point.

Bolstered by favorable tariff policies and their complementary trade structures, China's foreign trade with the other 14 RCEP members grew by 7.5 percent year-on-year to 12.95 trillion yuan ($1.83 trillion) in 2022, according to data from the General Administration of Customs.

The momentum has also been sustained this year, with China's imports and exports with these countries surging 7.3 percent year-on-year to 4.1 trillion yuan in the first four months of 2023.

Experts said that the RCEP is fundamentally an inclusive mega free trade agreement designed to promote shared prosperity and the equitable distribution of economic development across the Asia-Pacific region.

As tariffs are gradually reduced, the pact will provide consumers with a broader array of market choices, satisfying cross-border consumption demand and contributing to overall consumption upgrading, said Zhang Xiaotao, dean of the School of International Trade and Economics at the Beijing-based Central University of Finance and Economics.

Supporting this viewpoint, Wang Xiaohong, deputy director of the Department of Information at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, said that the RCEP framework has enriched the comparative advantages of each country and made them more attractive to other member countries for trade and investment under the same conditions.

Mike Walsh, executive vice-president of Dekra Group, a German testing, inspection and certification group with more than 48,000 employees globally, said that the RCEP will create more favorable conditions to spur foreign trade and investment activities in both China and throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

"We plan to use the technological capabilities accumulated in China to develop our operations in Southeast Asia in the coming years," said Walsh, adding that the RCEP pact supports the company's overall development plan for the Asia-Pacific region in terms of market and business management.

Focus on trains

A child takes a photo of a model of a China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation train during the Asia Pacific Rail 2023 exhibition in Bangkok, Thailand, on Wednesday. RACHEN SAGEAMSAK / XINHUA

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Acknowledgments show genuine feelings

By ZOU SHUO
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Apart from their teachers and parents, college graduates nowadays take the opportunity to also thank unconventional things and people in the acknowledgments of their graduation dissertations, such as a pet, music, coffee, a computer, idols or loved ones, something which has helped them get through difficult times.

The acknowledgments are seen as the most "tender" part of the thesis and they want to express their most genuine feelings.

Being digitally savvy, the students also publish their acknowledgments on different social media platforms to express their gratitude, which has touched the hearts of many.

*See **Students,** page 3*

VISIT…

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CHINA DAILY 中国日报

CHINA

Odd weather patterns hit most regions

Northern areas receive excessive rain while southern parts face drought

By LI HONGYANG
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China has been experiencing unusual weather patterns this year as northern regions receive excessive rainfall while southern regions face drought conditions, according to the China Meteorological Administration.

Northern regions including Shanxi, Shaanxi and Henan provinces have seen up to a 100 percent increase in rainfall, while southern areas have experienced a 20 to 40 percent decrease in rain, the administration said on Friday.

It is expected that in June, the number of days with highs above 35 C in East China, Central China and southern parts of North China, will be close to or exceed those in the same period last year.

Southern China has been suffering from a prolonged heatwave since May 26, with 578 weather stations reporting temperatures higher than the historical record by Wednesday.

Since May 26, regions including Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hunan and Guangdong provinces have seen temperatures over 35 C, while temperatures in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces have surpassed 40 C.

The abnormal weather conditions are expected to continue. From Friday to Wednesday, areas such as south of the Yangtze River, Yunnan and Sichuan provinces will still experience hot and dry weather.

Since January this year, the average precipitation in Yunnan province has been 97.6 millimeters on average, the lowest in the same period since 1961. The average number of dry days was 96.5 days, the third highest in the same period since 1961. Severe droughts occurred in this winter and spring, the administration said.

On May 18, a factory worker from Shijie town, Dongguan, Guangdong province was diagnosed with heat stroke, Guangzhou Daily reported. According to doctors, the worker had been outside for eight hours straight, prompting symptoms such as dizziness, heavy sweating, shortness of breath and confusion. After being rushed to hospital, the worker's temperature was found to be as high as 41 C, a clear indication of heat stroke. After several hours of medical intervention, the worker's condition was stable.

On May 26, in Qiaojia county, Yunnan province, ground surface temperature was a record-breaking 78.8 C.

Tourists hold umbrellas to block sunlight in Tian'anmen Square as temperatures climb over 30 C in Beijing on Friday.
WANG XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Household registration easier in Heilongjiang

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin
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More residents are now able to apply for household registration in northeastern China's Heilongjiang province, which has removed a number of requirements to ease the process, according to a recently released announcement.

Those with their own houses or who rent properties can apply for permanent residence, or *hukou*, by providing relevant certificates, according to the public security administration corps of the provincial department of public security.

Those without properties or who do not rent can also apply for community collective household registration, it added.

"Take the capital city Harbin as an example. In the past, people could apply for registration only after renting a housing estate for over six months, but now they can apply with a shorter waiting period," said Liang Dawei, deputy director of the corps.

"Now the policy can help them enjoy local social welfare much quicker since they can get local household registration much easier.

"We are making every effort to deepen household registration reform," he said.

For example, residents whose name is not the same as the one on the permanent residence certificate, due to errors or technical limitations for example, may encounter difficulties when dealing with archives or documents, thus the police station could add their former or proper names.

"This policy can also greatly reduce the time and procedures for residents to handle their business," Liang said.

Heilongjiang has seen a decline in population in recent years. It recorded 31.85 million permanent residents in 2020, according to the data of the 7th National Population Census, down by around 6.46 million from 2010.

Other regions in China have also announced further relaxation of rules for household registration to attract a wider range of talent and boost the development of the digital economy.

Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang province, for example, has lowered the requirements for education, age and employment, which means more people will have the opportunity to apply for residency. This includes full-time college graduates under age 35 who work in the city as well as postgraduates under age 45.

Police on the beat

The Hong Kong Police Band performs on bustling Zhonglou Street in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, on Thursday, the last day of the band's three-day exchange tour in Taiyuan. The police band is one of the cultural symbols of Hong Kong. All of its members are current police officers. WEI LIANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Ruling favors flex worker in labor dispute

By CHENG SI
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A ruling by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security has come down on the side of an injured deliveryman, who had been denied compensation due to the flexible nature of his employment contract.

In a recently published case, the food deliveryman, surnamed Xu, was injured during a delivery in November 2019. He requested both the freight forwarder — who contracted a food delivery management station from a platform — and the labor services company responsible for the station's operation and personnel recruitment, to provide medical compensation.

The two companies refused Xu's request, claiming that he did not directly work for them under contract.

However, the ministry's labor arbitration committee ruled that Xu did have labor relations with the freight forwarder from July to December in 2019, as the company included him in routine management such as checking work attendance and paying him monthly wages based on his performance.

Shen Jianfeng, a professor from the law school of the Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing, said that business and labor outsourcing is commonly used in the flexible employment sector.

In Xu's case, the food delivery platform outsourced a management station to the freight forwarder, and the freight forwarder outsourced labor recruitment and management to a labor services company. However, the freight forwarder became Xu's real "manager" by including him in the company's routine management and paying him a salary, even though in reality the company was not responsible for personnel management.

"It's necessary to make clear the interested parties of labor relations and make the judgment based on reality, rather than rigidly adhere to pro forma contracts that do not conform to reality," he said.

The human resources ministry said that it will continue to cooperate with the Supreme People's Court to enhance supervision of labor disputes involving platform-based flexible workers to improve the group's legal protection and guide them to protect their rights more rationally, as well as to ensure the platforms use labor in accordance with regulations and laws.

Lin Jia, a professor from the law school of Renmin University of China in Beijing, said that the latest wave of technological and industrial revolutions has had a great effect on society in terms of production and living styles, under which some new industries have grown to be new drivers of economic development and have incubated new forms of employment.

The flexibility of labor, work management and pay has also posed challenges to the legal definitions of labor relations, she said.

The latest figures from the All-China Federation of Trade Unions show that more than 84 million people have flexible jobs offered by platforms, and in the past few years, the central government has worked to improve their protection.

For example, the newly amended trade union law in 2021 clarifies that flexible workers have the right to join or organize trade unions. Eight central departments including the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Transport released a guideline in July 2021 to enhance supervision of labor relations between companies and flexible workers.

Lin said that employment is the most important livelihood, and labor relations is one of the most basic and important social relations. She suggested the nation build a multi-level labor rights protection system covering more workers to suit the development of platform-based flexible employment, and to push forward more humane labor relations for the common prosperity of all workers.

Briefly

BEIJING

Agreement signed with Argentina

Representatives of the governments of China and Argentina signed a cooperation plan on jointly building the Belt and Road in Beijing on Friday. This document is intended to deepen mutually beneficial cooperation between the two sides in infrastructure, energy, economy and trade, finance, humanities and other fields. The signing of this document is of great significance to deepening political mutual trust and synergy of visions between the two countries, and will create more cooperative business opportunities and benefit their peoples, according to the National Development and Reform Commission.

INNER MONGOLIA

Shenzhou XV crew ready for return trip

The Shenzhou XV mission crew members have completed all assigned tasks and are scheduled to return to Earth on Sunday, China Manned Space said on Friday. The crew will return to the Dongfeng landing site in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, it said, adding that the landing site and all systems have fully prepared to welcome the astronauts home. The crew of the Shenzhou XV and the Shenzhou XVI, which was launched on Tuesday, accomplished a handover ceremony on Friday. The Shenzhou XVI mission crew members, including the first Chinese civilian astronaut, reached orbit on Tuesday.

HEBEI

3,000-year-old village discovered

The ruins of a village dating back more than 3,000 years have been found in north China's Hebei province, according to local archaeologists. The village, in current Zhaoyao village of Wu'an city, covers about 220,000 square meters. It was built in the mid-Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BC). In the medium-sized village, archaeologists have found the ruins of roads, trenches, pottery kilns, waterways, cellars and rows of houses. They have also unearthed ceramics, pottery, bone-carved hair pins and tortoise shell pieces used for divination. A heating system was also found inside each of the houses.

CHINA DAILY — XINHUA

Ministry urges creation of more jobs for graduates

By LUO WANGSHU
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Social organizations are being urged to create more jobs for college graduates to boost employment as the jobless rate for youth surpassed 20 percent in April, according to a recently released notice by the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

According to the notice, social organizations and communities are encouraged to fully tap into service needs in communities and develop jobs to support employment.

Professional social organizations are encouraged to explore needs in the fields of education, medical care, science and technology, culture, social assistance, elderly care services, social work and childcare.

Charitable organizations such as foundations should be supported to increase public welfare and charity projects.

Internship positions should be offered in line with requirements for high-quality development, strengthening cooperation between universities and communities, which should participate in the "2023 Recruitment Plan for One Million Employment Internship Positions" program. Social organizations are also urged to set up internships.

Community social organizations should collect and release employment information to facilitate college graduates finding jobs in the community.

Social organizations such as charitable federations, employment promotion associations, and employment foundations should be supported in building employment information platforms, encouraging their members to provide employment services such as the release of recruitment information for free or at a low fee, the notice said.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the surveyed unemployment rate for people aged 16 to 24 was as high as 19.6 percent in the first quarter of 2023, and even 20.4 percent in April. It shows that youths, especially college graduates, are finding it increasingly difficult to find a job.

In addition, the number of college graduates this year is expected to reach a record high of roughly 11.58 million, up 820,000 year-on-year.

Captive-bred alligators released into the wild

By YAN DONGJIE and ZHU LIXIN
in Xuancheng, Anhui

Eighty-four captive-bred Chinese alligators from the Anhui Chinese Alligator National Nature Reserve were released into the wilderness of the reserve on Thursday, marking the start of this year's monthlong alligator release season.

This year is the end of a five-year plan for the release of Chinese alligators to boost their population in the wild. It is the 19th release season at the reserve, and the total number of released captive-bred Chinese alligators in Anhui will reach 1,608 this month.

In the early 2000s, the population of Chinese alligators in the wild was extremely low. Field surveys showed there were perhaps fewer than 200 of them, putting them in critically endangered status, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

In 2001, the State Forestry Administration launched the Chinese Alligator Protection and Release Project, which aimed to release captive-bred Chinese alligators into the wild in an effort to gradually increase their wild population.

From 2003 to 2018, the alligator reserve carried out 14 relocation projects, releasing 108 alligators. In 2019, based on the previous experience, a five-year release plan for 1,500 alligators was launched. From 2019 to last year, 1,300 artificially bred Chinese alligators were released.

The Chinese alligator is a critically endangered and first-class national protected wild animal in China. It is mainly found in the counties of Jingxian, Langxi, Guangde and Nanling, and Xuanzhou district of Xuancheng city in southeast Anhui province.

"In recent years, the number of wild Chinese alligators has been increasing, and their distribution is gradually expanding," said Sun Siqing, a researcher with the Anhui Chinese Alligator National Nature Reserve Administration. "The vast majority of released Chinese alligators have adapted to the wild environment and achieved natural breeding."

He said that during a field survey in 2021, Chinese alligators in the wild laid 14 litters of 320 eggs and hatched 137 young. Last year, they laid 602 eggs in 26 litters, producing 372 hatchlings.

Zhou Yongkang, a researcher with the administration, said the released alligators have a certain ratio of male to female, are in good health, and are distant relatives and with rich genetic diversity to ensure natural breeding and genetic exchanges.

The reserve has recorded detailed genetic information for each released alligator, equipped them with solar-powered satellite tracking devices, and established a database of wild released populations.

In the future, the reserve will continue to focus on the protection of the existing wild population and the restoration of the habitat to help recover the population of Chinese alligators in the wild.

Contact the writers at yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

Online
See more by scanning the code.

TOP NEWS

China, Singapore defense chiefs meet

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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Experts said the Association of Southeast Asian Nations should not fall into the geopolitical trap set by the United States, which is "coercing" regional countries to choose sides between China and the US, as China's defense minister told his Singaporean counterpart that Beijing firmly supports the strategic independence of ASEAN.

State Councilor and Minister of National Defense General Li Shangfu is paying a visit to Singapore and has been invited to attend and deliver a speech on China's new security proposals at the three-day Shangri-La Dialogue security forum, which opened on Friday evening, according to the Defense Ministry.

During his meeting with Singaporean Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen in Singapore on Thursday, Li said that the Chinese side firmly supports ASEAN centrality in regional architecture as well as its community building and strategic independence.

ASEAN is an important force for safeguarding peace and promoting development in both regional and international communities, Li said, according to Tan Kefei, a spokesman for China's Defense Ministry, who spoke at a Thursday news briefing in the city-state.

"Li said the Asia-Pacific is the common home (of China and ASEAN) and prosperity and stability are shared aspirations of people of all countries," said the spokesman.

Zuo Xiying, a professor of international relations at Renmin University of China, said that Beijing is willing to see Singapore and ASEAN maintain their strategic independence and not be "coerced" by Washington.

"The US is now attempting to force ASEAN countries to take sides between China and the US, so as to utilize them to contain China in various fields," he said, adding that such moves infringe on ASEAN's strategic independence.

Last week, the ministerial meeting of the so-called Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity that concluded in Detroit produced a pact on supply chains for key products. Launched last year, the IPEF is made up of 14 countries, and has been repeatedly criticized as a geopolitical tool of the US, which is seeking to isolate China in the region.

In addition, the coast guards of the US, Japan and the Philippines held trilateral maritime exercises in the South China Sea this week, the first such maneuvers among them.

Yuan Zheng, deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of American Studies, said the US has been trying to form "camps and cliques" in the Asia-Pacific region.

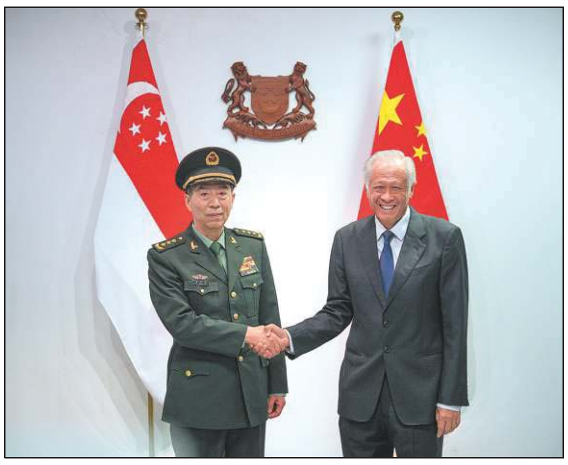
"But most Southeast Asian countries are not willing to get involved in the strategic game or even confrontation between China and the US, which would pose great threats to peace, security and prosperity," Yuan said, adding that China has actually benefited the region through political, economic and military exchanges with ASEAN countries.

Tan said Li and his Singaporean counterpart exchanged views on relations between the two nations and the two militaries, regional security situations, and issues of shared interest, noting that the meeting was "candid, in-depth and productive strategic communication".

The two defense ministers also witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of a secure defense telephone link.

Li also reiterated China's positions on the Taiwan question at the meeting, stressing that Taiwan is China's Taiwan and that the Taiwan question is at the core of fundamental interests for China.

China will continue to strive for peaceful reunification with the "greatest sincerity and utmost efforts", but will never renounce the use of force, he said.



State Councilor and Minister of National Defense General Li Shangfu (left), shakes hands with Singaporean Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen in Singapore on Thursday. Li will address the three-day Shangri-La Dialogue on China's new security proposals. VINCENT THIAN / AP

Trip: Nation to continue its efforts for peace in Ukraine

From page 1

"Such responses once again show that China is objective and impartial on the Ukraine crisis and the international community speaks highly of this," he said.

Chen Yuming, vice-president of the China Public Diplomacy Association, said, "The trip was full of hardship, twists and turns, and so is the settlement of the crisis".

To illustrate the "worrying situation" and the great risks of a potential escalation of the conflict, Li noted at the briefing that, "I spent a total of three days in Ukraine this time. Kyiv had air defense alerts every day during those three days, and there were two large-scale airstrikes. "

"As long as there is a glimmer of hope for peace, we should make active efforts instead of letting the conflict develop, let alone adding fuel to the fire, which will lead to the escalation of local conflicts into large-scale wars," he said.

During his trip, all parties expressed great concern over issues such as nuclear security, the humanitarian crisis and food security.

"Making sure that the situation cools down and eases is the fundamental way to solve the nuclear security issue," said the envoy.

He urged for a halt to moves to sending weapons to the conflict zone, otherwise the tension "will further spiral".

The envoy also criticized recent media disinformation that attempts to "alienate China from Ukraine" or from Russia, including one recent report by the Wall Street Journal on Li's trip that has been clarified by Kyiv.

"It is immoral and dangerous to fan up confrontation, spread disinformation and seek political selfish interests," he added.

Speaking of the prospects for a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, Li noted that despite the many challenges which have to be overcome before the various parties can sit at a negotiating table, there still has been some consensus, and "neither Russia nor Ukraine have completely closed the door on peace talks".

Smooth as silk

Workers purchase cocoons from silkworm farmers in Hai'an, Jiangsu province, on Thursday. The harvest season for silkworm cocoons recently started in the area, with multiple stations weighing and purchasing the commodities. Hai'an, a county-level city in Nantong, has established complete silk production and processing industrial chains by taking various measures. XU JINGBAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Purchase tax policy for NEVs to be extended

Further steps will encourage market, law-based business operating climate

By WANG KEJU
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China will extend and optimize the policy to reduce or waive purchase taxes on new energy vehicles amid efforts to promote high-quality development of the NEV industry and tap greater consumption potential, according to decisions made at a State Council executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Qiang on Friday.

The meeting noted that NEVs are a main focus of the transformation and upgrading of the automotive industry, which has broad space for development.

Reductions and exemptions on NEV purchase taxes will be prolonged and fine-tuned, and high-quality charging facilities will be built to further stabilize market expectations, improve the environment for consumption and tap greater consumption potential for such vehicles, it was stated.

The China Association of Automobile Manufacturers estimates that NEV sales in China will hit 9 million units this year, up from 6.88 million in 2022.

The meeting urged efforts to consolidate and enhance development strengths of NEVs, further optimize the industrial layout and achieve major advances in core technologies in key fields such as electric power systems, new chassis frameworks and intelligent driving systems. International and domestic resources will be leveraged in a well-coordinated way.

A sound mechanism of power battery recycling will be in place, and a vehicle-road-cloud ecosystem will be built to ensure that the entire industry chain, which promotes green development, is more self-supporting and that risks are better controlled, it was stated.

The meeting also decided on further policy steps to foster a market-oriented and law-based business environment in line with international standards, in a bid to anchor social expectations and boost confidence in development.

The meeting noted that China's economy got off to a good start this year, but the foundation of economic recovery is not fully solidified. Further steps will be taken to foster a market-oriented and law-based business environment in line with international standards on a priority basis.

The meeting said that a problem-oriented approach will be adopted to address pressing concerns facing enterprises and meet their actual needs. Targeted policy measures to ease market access, promote fair competition, protect intellectual property rights and build a unified national market will be rolled out in a phased way.

In addition, reforms in key areas to foster a more enabling business climate will be taken forward to enhance the effectiveness of relevant policies. Authorities concerned should strengthen their awareness that they are there to serve, according to the meeting.

The meeting called for greater efforts to exercise relevant policies and remove barriers hindering implementation to see that such policies are delivered on the ground and enhance enterprises' well-being.

National parks protect ecology in Tibet

By PALDEN NYIMA in Lhasa
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The Tibet autonomous region has been making efforts to turn areas near Qomolangma — known as Mount Everest in the West — into national parks to help protect the integrity of glaciers and local ecological conditions, according to the regional Bureau of Forestry and Grassland.

Qomolangma National Park, covering more than 33,700 square kilometers, has many of the highest mountains in the world and one of the most concentrated areas of glaciers and permanent snow cover. It has a rich diversity of species — both plants and animals — and is known as a repository of rare, endangered and unique life forms in the Himalayas.

In addition, another five sites — Changthang, Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon, Gaoligong Mountain and Sanjiangyuan — have all been included in the spatial layout of national parks or have been officially approved for establishment, according to the bureau.

Tibet will establish a national park demonstration zone, becoming the provincial-level region in China with the largest number and combined area of national parks, and the highest proportion of national land area in the country dedicated to such a purpose, it added.

Covering an area of approximately 298,000 sq km, Changthang National Nature Reserve is the main ecological boundary of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau in the framework of the national ecological security system.

A Tibetan antelope stands in the Changthang area on April 15. JIANG FAN / XINHUA

Development of the park has seen major progress and has entered its evaluation stage, a local ecological protection bureau said.

Xie Kunming, an official from the nature protection site management office at the bureau, said the park is an important national ecological security barrier within the desert ecosystem.

"As an inland lake area with the highest altitude in the world, it preserves a complete and unique alpine plateau grassland and desert ecosystem, as well as rare and endangered wildlife resources. It is home to the largest population of Tibetan antelopes and wild yaks in the wild," Xie said.

Zomga, deputy head of the regional Forestry and Grassland Bureau, noted in a recent article on the progress of national park development that the region has allocated more than 500 million yuan ($70 million) for the construction of 92 high-standard management stations in the national parks of Changthang and Qomolangma.

The region has also been implementing a series of policies to support construction and management of the national park. Projects include returning grazing land to grassland status, protection and restoration of wetlands, compensation payments for wildlife damage and improving habitats for both fauna and flora.

"Over the past decade, by working together with multiple scientific research institutes and using more advanced technologies, more than 500 personnel have visited the Changthang area in northern Nagchu to carry out various activities," Zomga said.

"Preliminary research has found the largest breeding area for the Tibetan antelope — with a population of more than 100,000," he said. "An aerial drone captured a scene of 60,000 Tibetan antelope migrating."

Also, more rural residents can be provided with jobs as forest rangers for the national parks.

Thublo, a herdsman from Nagchu, now works as a patrolman in the Changthang area.

Every time he goes on patrol with his colleagues for 100 to 200 km, he takes his binoculars and camera to ensure no one hunts animals or illegally enters prohibited areas.

"I'm proud of my job. Protecting the environment is as important as protecting our own home," the 37-year-old said.

Students: Trend points to diverse education

From page 1

Experts said that these thoughtful and unique acknowledgments show the pursuit and longing for a beautiful life by young people. The diverse education they have received has made them more innovative and dynamic in their thinking and more willing to express their true feelings.

Zhou Yixiang, a senior undergraduate student at Beijing Language and Culture University, thanked his girlfriend, with whom he had only spent one day together, in his acknowledgments.

He met his girlfriend on a flight from Toronto, Canada, to Shanghai in December 2021.

The pair exchanged a look on the flight with their masks on, he helped to carry her suitcase after landing, and they started chatting after they lived in nearby hotel rooms when they were under 14-day compulsory quarantine.

They spent a day together when the quarantine ended, after which he returned to his hometown in Sichuan province and she went to Shandong province.

Due to the pandemic, they never got the opportunity to meet one another and she returned to Canada to continue her postgraduate studies in May last year.

The two mainly rely on WeChat to express their feelings for each other.

"When I was writing my thesis and encountered difficulties, she was my biggest motivation, because I told myself that I must do it right, so I could graduate and meet her in September," he said, adding that he has got offers to study at universities in the United States and Canada for postgraduate studies.

"You are the eternal source of my determination. Since our first encounter on flight AC027, you have already become the celestial star that guides me every night, the radiant moon that illuminates my heart and the melody that dances in my soul," he wrote.

Zhou also thanked his girlfriend's two dogs and her cat. He likes small animals but does not have a pet of his own.

Su Xin, 21, a senior undergraduate student at Jinan University in Guangdong province, thanked her computer, music and iced latte in her acknowledgments.

She listened to South Korean pop star Yesung many times when writing her thesis, as well as *La Campanella* by Franz Liszt, which has been one of her favorite pieces of music since she started to practice piano at an early age.

"The computer, which I thought was about to break, continued to function until I finished the thesis, in the same way as I was not giving up despite encountering great difficulties in writing the thesis," she said.

"More importantly, I wanted to thank myself, as I have always loved myself and try to pull myself out of dark places even though I know I am not perfect," she added.

Su said compared with more traditional acknowledgments, students nowadays are more inclusive and not afraid to express their true feelings.

"One might ask if it is really necessary to thank small things like music or coffee in your thesis, and my answer is 'Yes', because when I am down, the sudden encouragement from a song is as powerful as the care and help from my parents or teachers. The encouragement can last a long time and help me overcome my sadness."

Pop star Zhang Jie has an important place in Wang Yuhan's acknowledgments.

The 21-year-old from Hubei Normal University said she started to listen to Zhang's songs while she was a middle-school student and his music has accompanied her in major moments of her life, such as the high school entrance and college entrance exams.

She wrote that "hardship is the best gift", which are lyrics in one of Zhang's songs, had motivated her when she encountered difficulties. "His unwavering pursuit and love for music, staying true to his original inspiration and his youthful spirit has also influenced and molded me," she said.

COMMENT

Editorial

Troublemaker Washington threatening peace in Asia

'Our militaries are operating and training together like never before to maintain peace, deter aggression and respond to crises," US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin told a joint news conference after his meeting with Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada in Tokyo on Thursday, a day ahead of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore where defense ministers of countries in the Asia-Pacific region are gathering to discuss ways to prevent confrontations and conflicts, and maintain peace and development.

That Austin accused China of "coercive behavior" and attempting "to undermine the rules-based international order" makes clear which country's aggression the United States and Japan are trying to deter. This is a typical case of the pot calling the kettle black, for the US has been instigating conflicts and "color revolutions" while claiming to help maintain peace and promote "democracy".

Why else is the US trying to extend NATO eastward? The US has even led NATO to agree to open a liaison office in Tokyo in 2024. In early 2021, it also "resurrected" the Quad, a security dialogue among the US, Japan, Australia and India. And in September 2021, it struck the AUKUS security alliance with the United Kingdom and Australia to supply nuclear-powered submarines to Canberra. These security alliances and arrangements are open attempts to encircle China.

Equally important, the US has been interfering in the Taiwan question and, in violation of the principles of the three joint communiques, it has been selling arms to the Chinese island apart from holding military exercises in the Western Pacific. These moves are a challenge to peace, not attempts to "maintain peace" as Austin claimed.

Austin's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue, scheduled for Saturday, is titled "United States' Leadership in the Indo-Pacific". Perhaps the US equates "leadership" with "hegemony".

In contrast, Chinese State Councilor and Defense Minister Li Shangfu's speech, scheduled for Sunday, is titled "China's New Security Initiative", which opposes the pursuit of one country's security at the cost of another's. The contrast in the two countries' approach to peace is clear.

In keeping with its peaceful coexistence diplomacy, China brokered peace between Iran and Saudi Arabia earlier this year, leading to the two Middle East countries re-establishing diplomatic ties after seven years. It is now trying to mediate peace between Russia and Ukraine in an effort to help end the Ukraine conflict.

The US should be aware that strengthening alliances is one thing and interfering in the Taiwan question is another. As Li said in his talks with Singaporean Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen, the Taiwan question is of China's core interest and China will never compromise on its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The sooner the US understands this the better.

Wu Baiyi

US must stop playing Taiwan card

In August 2022, then US House speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan dealt a serious blow to the already deteriorating Sino-US relations. And although the meeting between the two countries' leaders on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Bali, Indonesia, in November 2022 raised some hopes of bilateral ties returning to the normal track, Sino-US relations continue to deteriorate with the level of official exchanges falling to a historical low.

The deterioration in bilateral ties is neither in the interest of China nor the United States. China has said that, despite improving Sino-US relations being of great importance, it will not make any compromise on the Taiwan question, as it is of China's core interest.

Hence, for bilateral ties to be back on track, the US needs to adhere to the principles the two sides agreed to on the Taiwan question. But the US administration's actions related to the Taiwan question have been downright provocative, which is not what President Joe Biden meant when he said that Washington seeks to put "guardrails" on the Sino-US relationship, meaning taking measures to prevent conflict.

By interfering in the Taiwan question, the US is interfering not only in China's internal affairs but also trying to prevent the reunification of Taiwan with the motherland. In fact, the US is trying to draw maximum geopolitical leverage by raising tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

However, the Biden administration must realize that stabilizing, rather than worsening, the situation across the Strait is in the best interest of the US. And the first thing it should do in this regard is to stop supporting and encouraging separatist forces in Taiwan to seek "independence".

Yet the US has been doing the opposite, apparently trying to hollow out the political foundation of Sino-US relations set by the three joint communiques. This could force China to take extreme measures if the situation spirals out of control. Some US politicians are willing to take such risks, but there still are some rational people in the US who realize the consequences of a conflict, and therefore don't support the US' moves.

It is in the best interest of the two sides to take steps to resume strategic communication and dialogue, and build mutual understanding and trust. For that, of course, the US needs to change its diplomatic posture and build an atmosphere conducive to resuming normal bilateral exchanges.

Stabilizing the situation across the Strait will help maintain peace and development in the Asia-Pacific region, and is in the long-term interest of the US. And despite competition between major powers being inevitable, the competition should be fair and limited to trade. The consequences of unfair competition could be ugly.

As the two largest economies in the world, the US and China should act responsibly. To do that, the two sides need to manage their differences on the Taiwan question. For example, the US shouldn't intensify tensions by making provocative moves.

The Chinese side has learned valuable lessons from war, and its foreign policy decisions are now deeply influenced by the ancient idea of "caution against war" and the strategic principle of being reasonable, disciplined and mutually beneficial.

It's time the two sides brought together all countries in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond to end the geopolitical game of confrontation. In this regard, the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore from Friday to Sunday can provide some guidance to the US, because the defense ministers of Asia Pacific countries have come together for the dialogue to discuss ways to prevent confrontations and conflicts.

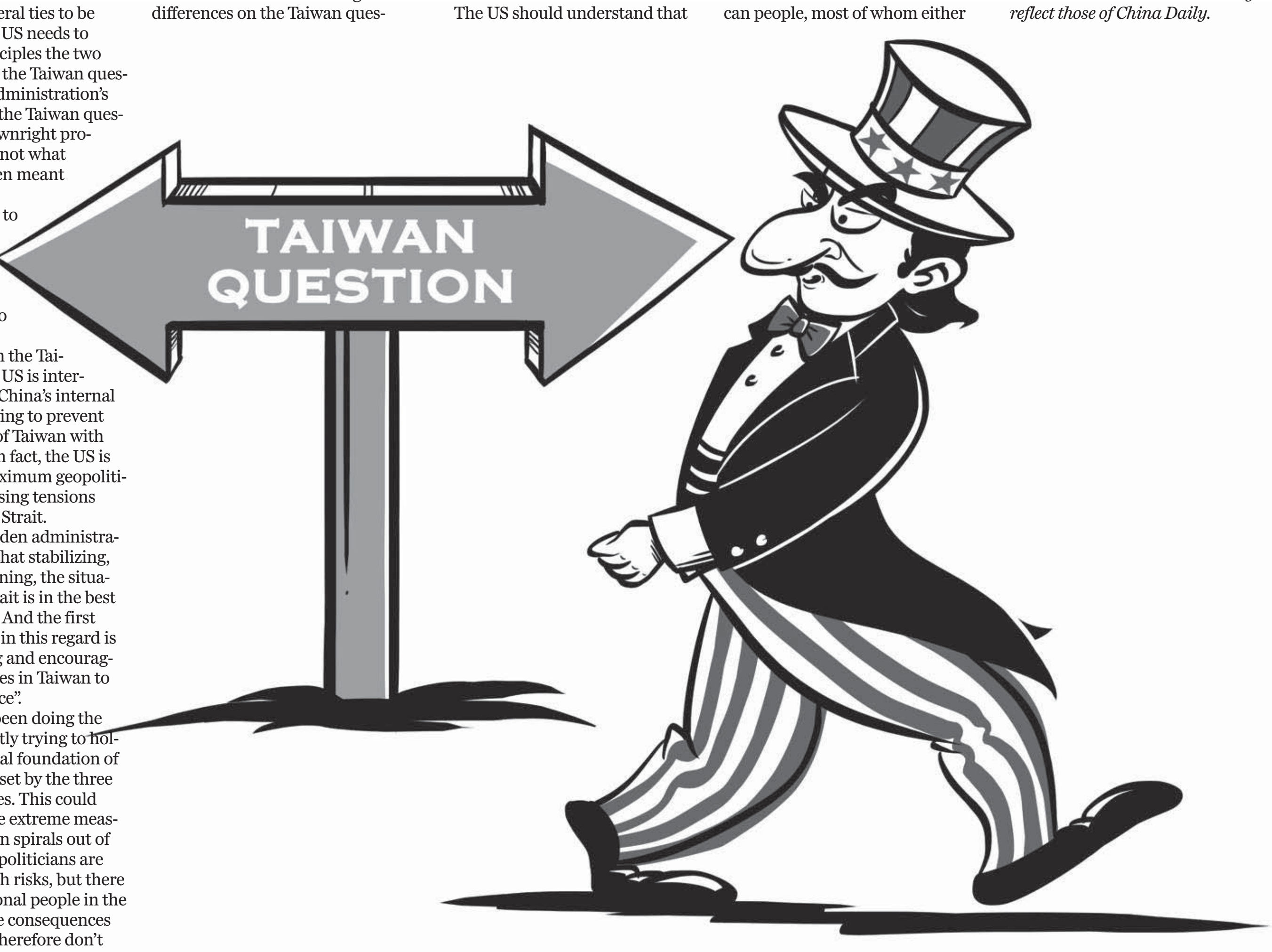
The US should understand that by destabilizing the cross-Strait situation, it will increase the risk of conflict.

Also, there is huge difference between China and the US on the Taiwan question. China emphasizes that cross-Strait relations are China's internal affairs and no external power has the right to interfere in it. China's position is recognized by not only international documents such as the Potsdam Declaration, but also by the United Nations and all the countries that have diplomatic ties with China, including the US.

Yet some US politicians have been trying to interfere in the Taiwan question, forcing China to draw a redline and warn them that it is not to be crossed under any circumstances. These US politicians should learn from the American people, most of whom either don't care about the Taiwan question or don't know where Taiwan is, because they have to deal with pressing individual and domestic issues which the US administration doesn't seem interested in addressing.

So if the US politicians really confront China on the Taiwan question, they will be despised by the American people for creating another big problem which will eat up more US resources and leave people back home to pay the cost. The US politicians should learn from the American public's lack of interest in geopolitical confrontations, and attend to their domestic woes.

The author is a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

Wang Lili

Enhancing China's image through effective communication

While addressing a group study session on May 31, 2021, President Xi Jinping stressed the importance of improving China's international communication to present a true, multi-dimensional and panoramic picture of China.

In recent years, as China's national strength continues to increase, China has also been facing increasingly challenging geopolitical obstacles and ideological bias. Led by the United States, some Western countries have been continuously smearing China's international image using issues such as human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

Making China's international communication more effective to enhance the country's international image is essential to ensuring China plays a crucial role in global governance and helps build a community with a shared future for mankind.

We should first understand the global picture and attitude of public opinion, and listen to the voices of international audiences with an equal and inclusive attitude, and conduct dialogue and communication on this basis.

According to the layered approach to public opinion espoused by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung, based on channels of information acquisition and expression, there are three categories of public opinion: core, central and marginal. Core public opinion refers to governments' opinion, while central refers to elite public opinion, and marginal represents general public opinion. Elite public opinion primarily comes from think tanks, universities, the media and businesses.

International communication is essentially an ideological battle, where the intellectual community represented by think tanks and universities serves as the brain and agenda-setter of the battle of ideas. Therefore, Chinese think tanks and universities have to play an important role in international communication.

It is crucial for Chinese think tanks and universities to come up with innovative ideas by thoroughly studying Chinese thoughts, which will enhance the defining and interpretative power of Chinese scholars in the international public opinion sphere.

As knowledge-intensive institutions, think tanks and universities can bridge the gaps in global governance by using their intellectual innovation capability, disseminating public opinion, and establishing transnational think tank networks. They can provide platforms for consultation, dialogue and cooperation for countries so as to address global issues. This will help enhance China's rule-making capacity in global governance.

Also, China should fully leverage the cross-cultural communication power of movies and television programs in telling its story. Films and TV dramas have an advantage over other forms of media in disseminating ideas and shaping values through comprehensive audiovisual expressions. Unlike news media that transmit fragmented information, movies and TV dramas are able to construct a relatively close narrative structure to tell a complete story. And in cross-cultural communication, they can provide sufficient background information to help the audience better understand the message.

Countries around the world are telling their respective story to enhance their international image and soft power. Take the United States for example. Hollywood movies and the Fulbright Program have contributed to achieving the US' strategic communication objectives. It is, therefore, important for China to delve into the remarkable achievements of the Chinese modernization and use its movies and TV dramas to communicate with the rest of the world.

It is vital for China to have strategic determination and national confidence, strengthen its communication and integration between the global intellectual community, diplomatic circles and media industry.

China also ought to use an innovative communication strategy and narrative models in response to the changes in international public opinion. Following established communication principles and laws, the country's international communication should be audience-oriented, effective and ideas-driven, in order to present a credible, likable, and respectable image of China.

Furthermore, China should utilize digital communication to tell its story to the rest of the world.

In recent years, the US has labeled China's mainstream media as "foreign agents" or "foreign missions", and some countries claim the country's main social media platforms are "State-affiliated media". Besides, the global information landscape is undergoing comprehensive restructuring due to the influence of digital platforms, with international communication shifting from traditional media to social media.

Therefore, it is necessary to include "diverse subjects, diverse narratives", adapt to the trend of digital communication, and synergize mass communication and grassroots communication, traditional mainstream media and social media, as well as individual narratives and collective narratives to improve China's international communication.

We should realize that foreign audiences' perceptions of China today are not fully based on rationality and facts. Non-rational elements such as emotions, sentiments and public opinion play a more significant role than facts in their perceptions.

By offering "competitive truths" through diverse strategies, China can build relationships, thereby enhancing its "empathetic communication" ability. It is also important to skillfully use compelling and moving Chinese stories to attract more foreign audiences, in a bid to resolve differences and disputes, and minimize opposition through emotional resonance.

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BUSINESS

2 companies finish filings for IPO overseas

Regulator says 39 firms submitted similar float plans by May 25

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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The first two companies scheduled to list overseas after new regulations on overseas public market floats by mainland enterprises took effect on March 31, have completed filings with the China Securities Regulatory Commission, said Fang Xinghai, vice-chairman of the country's top securities watchdog.

Fang made the remarks at the 2023 Global Investor Conference held in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Thursday.

Suzhou, Jiangsu province-based autonomous driving solutions provider iMotion Automotive Technology and Beijing-based food staples provider Shiyue Daotian Group obtained their approvals from the regulator on Tuesday for a listing on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

The ongoing global market volatility and risk of an economic downturn in major economies have hit initial public offerings at major stock exchanges.

Globally, the financing value and number of IPOs fell by 65 percent and 20 percent year-on-year, respectively, during the first quarter, professional services provider KPMG said.

IPO proceeds in the United States were less than $3 billion in the first three months, the lowest since 2017, KPMG said.

According to the latest data released by the CSRC, 39 companies submitted their overseas listing applications to the regulator by May 25, with three bound for Nasdaq, while the rest were headed to the Hong Kong bourse.

The CSRC issued new regulations for overseas listing and securities issuance by Chinese mainland companies on Feb 17. The regulations call for a filing-based mechanism and eliminate in-advance administrative scrutiny.

They also clarify the legal responsibilities, especially those pertaining to violations, and ease certain limits for eligible companies to better meet their financing requirements.

The new rules also stress optimization of cross-border securities regulatory cooperation, which will facilitate further auditing cooperation between China and the United States and reduce the delisting risks of US-listed Chinese companies, said Liu Gang, a strategist at China International Capital Corp Ltd.

The rules also facilitate a deeper opening-up of the Chinese capital markets, which means global investors will get more opportunities to benefit from China's economic growth, he said.

Since the middle of 2021, companies from the Chinese mainland have decelerated their pace of listing on US exchanges.

The new rules are expected to normalize overseas listings and smoothen overseas financing channels for companies, Liu added.

While 37 Chinese mainland companies debuted on the US stock markets in the first half of 2021, only three such IPOs were made in the second half of that year, mainly due to an audit dispute between China and the United States.

The number further slid to 12 in 2022, according to market tracker Wind Info.

CSRC's Fang said at the meeting that the depositary receipt business under the stock connect program will be expanded and optimized to support more issuances of Global Depositary Receipts in European markets by Chinese mainland companies.

Data from the public domain show that five companies have obtained CSRC approval for GDR issuances so far this year, while 16 others were granted such approval in 2022.

From farm to fork

Liu Zhicai (right), general manager of Wada Modern Agricultural Technology Co Ltd, a Fuyang, Anhui-based leader in the fresh tomato industry, showcases the company's core products on Thursday. Anhui, a province in eastern China, is pursuing high-quality development and has been a pioneer of modern farm technologies to enhance its agricultural prowess. FAN ZIHAO / CHINA DAILY

CCUS project to help achieve green goals

By ZHENG XIN
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The operation of Asia's largest carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS) facility for the coal-fired power generation sector will further decrease the emissions intensity of power plant operations while facilitating China's carbon peak and neutrality goals, said industry experts.

China Energy Investment Corp announced on Friday that it has started operations at Asia's largest coal-linked CCUS facility, which is attached to a generation unit at the company's Taizhou coal-fired power plant in Jiangsu province.

The project will capture 500,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide each year, said the company, also known as China Energy, one of the leading companies building pilot CCUS projects in China.

CCUS has become a focus area for China's power generators as well as oil companies, as the country pursues its goals to reach a carbon dioxide emissions peak by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060.

The Chinese government has included CCUS as part of its national strategy and is providing a favorable policy environment for its development and deployment, with domestic companies stepping up research in the sector.

China National Offshore Oil Corp kicked off the operation of the country's first offshore carbon capture and storage demonstration project in the eastern waters of the South China Sea on Thursday, filling the gap in China's offshore carbon capture, treatment, injection and storage technology.

Last year, State-owned energy company China Petrochemical Corp launched a 1-million-ton-per-year CCUS project, the country's largest, at one of its oil refineries in Shandong province.

Industry experts said that by capturing and storing carbon dioxide from power plants, industrial facilities and oil and gas fields as well as other sources, the technology offers a significant opportunity for China to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions.

Captured carbon dioxide can be utilized for various purposes, including enhanced oil recovery and chemical manufacturing. It will not only decarbonize the country's energy sectors but also promote economic growth, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

Zhu Yi, a senior analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence, a market monitor, said implementing CCUS projects is currently expensive, as the technology requires a significant upfront investment.

"CCUS is one of the most effective ways for Chinese plants to achieve emission cuts, though producers could incur higher operational costs and capital expenditure needed to build the infrastructure, which could deter the application of CCUS," she said.

"The wider commercial application on a larger scale and the development of technology could reduce costs, which would promote the usage of CCUS among high-emissions industries."

China has around 40 CCUS demonstration projects in operation or under construction, with a total annual capture capacity of around 3 million tons per year, according to a CCTV report.

According to a report released by energy company Shell, China, with an estimated 2,400 gigatons in storage capacity, has significant geological potential for storing carbon, second only to the United States.

Briefly

Tianjin cross-border e-commerce trade up

Tianjin's cross-border e-commerce trade touched around 4.97 billion yuan ($700.6 million) in the first five months of 2023, up 3.18 percent year-on-year, according to the municipal bureau of commerce. During the period, more than 1.58 billion yuan of imports and over 3.38 billion yuan of exports were declared via the port city's official cross-border comprehensive e-commerce service platform, marking an increase of 2.86 percent and 3.33 percent year-on-year, respectively, said the bureau. The city in North China has vowed to further promote the construction of the China (Tianjin) cross-border e-commerce comprehensive pilot zone, and support more foreign trade enterprises in traditional industries and manufacturing companies looking to expand their markets via cross-border e-commerce trade.

Yuan strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 26 pips to 7.0939 against the US dollar on Friday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the Chinese currency is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the US dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the interbank market each business day.

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank continued to inject funds into the financial system through open market operations on Friday. The People's Bank of China said it had conducted 2 billion yuan ($281.9 million) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 2 percent. The move is aimed at keeping liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system, the central bank said. A reverse repo is a process in which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in future.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Infrastructure plays bigger role in fueling recovery

By ZHUANG QIANGE
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Participants look at an exhibition during the 14th International Infrastructure Investment and Construction Forum.
ZHANG JINJIA / XINHUA

Amid China's intensified efforts to achieve its dual-carbon goals and high-quality development, infrastructure, supported by rapidly evolving technologies and their wider applications, should be given a bigger role to fuel the global economic recovery in the post-COVID-19 era, experts said at a forum on Thursday.

The comments were made during the 14th International Infrastructure Investment and Construction Forum in the Macao Special Administrative Region, which aims to showcase green development in the industry and discuss new approaches for sustainable development.

Themed "green leadership, digital intelligence, financial empowerment, win-win cooperation," the two-day event attracted more than 3,000 delegates from over 60 countries and regions, including more than 40 ministerial-level officials and senior executives of financial institutions.

Dai Hegen, chairman of the board of China National Chemical Engineering Group Co Ltd, said that advancing green and low-carbon economic and social development is key to achieving high-quality development.

"While infrastructure provides important support for economic and social development and meets people's needs for a better life, it also brings great pressure to the ecological environment," Dai said.

"With the global economy back on the growth track and technologies evolving rapidly, more opportunities will arise in the infrastructure sector, injecting impetus into global recovery," he added.

The forum also hosted a specialized exhibition focusing on regional connectivity, low carbon and digital intelligence.

As a pillar industry that has long been shoring up the nation's economy, infrastructure has been gathering pace since this year, evidenced by the progress reports from major State contractors.

A highway in Cixi, Zhejiang province, which is a supportive part of the Xincheng River district renovation project, reported big progress, as the installation of the hollow plate for a major bridge on the highway was completed last week, laying a solid foundation for the upcoming construction process, said China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd (CR24), a unit of China Railway Construction Corp.

To ensure the smooth completion of the hollow plate installation, the project department, combined with the site conditions, organized professional and technical teams for simulation before conducting each specific construction procedure and made various emergency response plans during the construction process. At the same time, on-site operators were provided with operation technology and safety technology disclosures, CR24 said.

"The whole installation process has been smooth and successful thanks to the team members' efforts, who have been repeatedly inspecting equipment such as truck cranes and excavators to ensure that the entire installation process was safe and efficient. We are confident the highway will be delivered on schedule," the CR24 project manager said.

The supportive highway project includes building four roads and is listed in Cixi's five-year development plan to integrate the development of the Xincheng River district with that of other key blocks in the city, promote road traffic facilities and improve livelihoods in these areas.

The builder is also leveraging its edge in railway construction to support the upcoming 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province's provincial capital, in September.

CR24 said Xiaoshan West Railway Station, which was built in the 1930s in Hangzhou, has gotten back on track after the renovation work on the station's underground electric cable network — the power and telecom cables — was completed.

The station will be a key transportation hub not only supporting the upcoming 19th Asian Games in September but also helping the provincial capital play a stronger role in integrated regional development, CR24 said.

Mainly for passenger boarding and alighting, vehicle handling and cargo dispatching, the station, which has been in use for decades, has seen most of its signal and contact network equipment out of service, with the underground cable arrangement complex and "primitive", the project manager with CR24 said.

After the renovation, the railway station will have a larger operating capacity in terms of both passengers and trains as the new cable network will enable more rail lines to be connected to the station, making it a significant hub in the provincial capital, he said.

Policy, technology key to new energy system

By LIU YUKUN
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The development of a new energy system will be bolstered by better policy management and technological advancements, as highly fluctuating renewable energy sources connect to the grid, posing challenges for stable power generation, experts said.

The key measures include strengthening standards in the new energy sector and improving the calculation and verification system of carbon emissions, they said.

Further steps are expected to accelerate the construction of a national unified electricity market and improve the coal-fired power pricing mechanism, the experts said.

Meanwhile, efforts must be heightened to speed up research and development of new energy storage technologies and advance the digitalization of power grids, they added.

Shi Yubo, head of the China Energy Research Society, said the key to accelerating the planning and construction of a new energy system lies in the building of a new power system. In the future, as a high proportion of non-fossil energy sources connect to the grid, the power system will undergo profound changes.

Guo Jianbo, senior adviser of State Grid Corp of China and honorary president of the China Electric Power Research Institute, said power generation from renewable energy sources is highly random and volatile, and the large-scale substitution of conventional power generation units by renewable energy units poses a risk to stable and safe operations, as well as challenges like lower economic viability for some companies.

According to data from the National Energy Administration, in the first quarter of 2023, the country had 47.4 million kilowatts of renewable energy installations, a year-on-year increase of 86.5 percent, accounting for 80.3 percent of the newly installed capacity of all energy types.

As of the first quarter, total installed capacity of renewable energy in China reached 1.258 billion kW.

The proportion of new energy's installed capacity will rise to 41 percent of the total energy types by 2030, while the percentage of power generation from renewables will grow to 22 percent, according to estimates from the State Grid Energy Research Institute.

To deal with problems in the establishment of new power systems, experts said it is necessary to have coal-fired electricity generation as a mainstay in the short-term, develop power storage technologies, promote the digitalization of grids and encourage the setting up of virtual power plants.

Guo said further efforts are needed to innovate technologies, including carbon capture, utilization and storage, to promote clean and low-carbon coal-fired power generation.

According to Guo, pumped-storage hydropower will remain the most competitive type of energy storage before 2030 due to its safety, high efficiency and cost-effectiveness, along with rapid development of new types of energy storage technologies that are expected to become more prominent in the future.

HOSPITALITY

Group tourism thriving with Chinese travelers returning to Laos

VIENTIANE — With the tourism sector in Laos gradually recovering, the Lao government expects that China's resumption of outbound group tours will be a strong boost to the Southeast Asian country's tourism industry.

Laos has seen a boom in tourism during the first three months of 2023 as more than 831,000 foreign tourists visited the country, in stark contrast to the 211,898 overseas visitors in the first six months of 2022.

Statistics compiled by the Lao Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism show that among the total arrivals, 344,405 visitors were from Thailand, around 180,000 came from Vietnam, 143,312 from China and 45,756 from South Korea.

Meanwhile, the Lao government and private sectors have been preparing for the arrival of large numbers of Chinese tourists after Laos was listed among countries greenlit by the Chinese government for outbound group tours.

Speaking at a meeting on preparations for Chinese tourists held on May 26, Lao Deputy Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism Ounthuang Khaophan said the Chinese tourism market is a source of great revenue and because of this, many countries have been engaged in promotion schemes to attract Chinese tourists.

A huge boost to the growth of this market is the China-Laos Railway, which enables fast and convenient travel between Laos and China, while more flights between Lao capital Vientiane and a number of Chinese cities are opening up, further facilitating travel, Ounthuang said.

A food vendor at a night market in Vientiane told Xinhua on Monday that Chinese tourists are back, bringing huge benefits to the tourism industry in Laos.

"I believe that the number of tourists visiting Laos will increase rapidly in the coming months, especially those from China, because of the reopening of China and the launch of the cross-border passenger service on the China-Laos Railway," the food vendor said.

The new cross-border train service has been widely advertised internationally as part of integrated passenger transport services to promote tourism in Laos.

The railway has handled 13,310 cross-border passenger trips since the launch of its passenger service.

As the China-Laos Railway serves as a crucial part of tourism infrastructure, Lao authorities estimate that around 368,000 Chinese travelers will visit the country in 2023, up 21 percent from last year.

Laos is preparing many facilities and services to welcome Chinese tourists and encourage them to return.

The Lao government has also been improving tourism products and modernizing the tourism industry to suit the Chinese market.

"I've heard that China resumed outbound group tours this year. And I'm very much looking forward to welcoming our Chinese clients back," Nangnoy, a food vendor in Vang Vieng, a tourism town in Vientiane province, told Xinhua recently.

She added that Laos has many nature-based tourist destinations. In addition, there are numerous colorful cultural traditions to be observed among the country's ethnic groups, while old temples and historical sites are another big lure.

"I fully believe that we will see a significant increase in Chinese tourist arrivals this year," Nangnoy added.

During the Lao government's monthly meeting on May 23, the cabinet told state departments to hold talks with tourism business operators and share ideas and activities to be organized during Visit Laos Year 2024 to revitalize the tourism industry and boost the economy.

The Lao government considers tourism its top priority in revitalizing the economy, and the country is preparing to welcome an influx of foreign visitors in 2023.

The Lao Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism aims to attract 1.4 million international visitors by the end of 2023, with a revenue target of up to $340 million.

XINHUA

Travelers take a tour of the Patuxai Victory Gate in Vientiane, capital of Laos, in February. KAI QIAO / XINHUA

Children learn to pilot a plane on a C919 flight simulator at a children's science and technology museum in Tianjin on June 1. SUN FANYUE / XINHUA

Family trips spurring festival market boom

Parent-child bookings increase as industry sees post-pandemic rebound

By ZHANG LINWAN

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This year's International Children's Day which falls on Thursday was special for Zhang Moxin, a primary school student from Beijing, as she went on a trip with her parents to Luoyang, Henan province.

Zhang's mother said they hoped to give the girl a perfect childhood, so for the first time, they organized a tour for the festival.

"We will taste local specialties and try out *hanfu* (a traditional Chinese style of clothing)," the mother said.

Data from the travel portal Tuniu showed that among its users who booked trips for this weekend, 46 percent travel with children.

Family tours have become a popular way to celebrate International Children's Day, driving a small tourism boom during this weekend, said industry experts.

While most tourists opted to travel locally or to nearby cities, families with preschool children preferred long-haul trips, according to Tuniu. The most favored destinations included Shanghai, Beijing, Sanya in Hainan and Lijiang in Yunnan province.

In terms of travel method, tourists gave priority to self-travel tours and small-sized tour groups.

Small groups allow travelers to have a thorough tour rather than cursory sightseeing and meet families' demand for privacy, comfort and freedom, industry analysts said.

Naturally, theme parks such as Shanghai Disney Resort became a popular choice for families with kids during this weekend.

46 percent
of users booking tours for this weekend on travel portal Tuniu tour with children

150 percent
year-on-year rise in parent-child tour orders placed on travel portal Ctrip during the first five months of this year

Domestic travel service and social networking platform Mafengwo reported that the average popularity of theme parks in China increased about 50 percent during this week.

Of them, the theme park operator Fantawild is holding a variety of celebrations from Thursday to Sunday in nearly 20 Fantawild Adventure resorts across the country, including fireworks shows, float parades, competitions and stage performances.

Museums and historical sites also saw a surge in booking numbers as parents hope their children can gain not only happiness but learning during the trips.

Chen Yihang, a mother from Hubei province, traveled with her 10-year-old son to Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi province, on Saturday.

The tour was his Children's Day gift, Chen said.

"We plan to go to the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor which he has learned about from books and wanted to visit in person," she added. The attraction is renowned for terra cotta warriors from the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC).

Many travel agencies also diversified their study tour products and provided customized services.

Launched by the online travel agency Ctrip, the two-day study tour in Dunhuang, Gansu province features three major scenic spots including the Mogao Grottoes, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Dunhuang Museum, and the Mingsha Mountain and Crescent Spring.

Kids can learn about the history of Dunhuang, participate in activities, such as mural copying with their parents, and admire a sunset in the desert, according to Ctrip.

In addition, every group consists of two families at most and offers a study tour mentor and photographer.

Figures from the OTA showed that during the first five months of 2023, the number of parent-child tour orders rose about 150 percent year-on-year. Parent-child tourism is prospering, as the overall tourism market has rebounded, said analysts from the OTA.

The main consumers are parents of the post-1980 and post-90 generations, who have higher demand for tour products as consumption upgrades and educational philosophy changes, analysts said.

They pay close attention to the details of travel arrangements such as safety, accommodation and food for kids. Meanwhile, they require more activities during the trips that involve not only children but the family.

Hainan Airlines takes to the skies with international routes

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Flight HU437 departed from Shenzhen Baoan International Airport at 1:15 am on May 28 and arrived at Fiumicino Airport in Rome, Italy, at 8:30 am local time, marking the resumed operation of the fourth international air route operated by Hainan Airlines in Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

Ding Yongzheng, board chairman of Hainan Airlines, which is headquartered in South China's Hainan province, told a resumption ceremony two days ahead of the flight that joining Fangda Group, a large company specializing in carbon, steel, medicine, commerce and aviation as its core businesses, has given the airline a new lease on life.

"In response to the State Council, China's Cabinet, and the Civil Aviation Administration of China, the airline focusing on its core aviation business has undergone a significant transformation," Ding noted.

With the COVID-19 pandemic well under control, the aviation industry has embraced a robust recovery since early 2023. Against the backdrop, Hainan Airlines is ramping up the resumption of its domestic and international air routes. As a result, both its flight frequency and passenger throughput have substantially increased, he said.

Looking to the future, HNA Aviation Group, the parent company of Hainan Airlines, will actively respond to the strategic initiatives of the CAAC and the Shenzhen city government to step up the construction of Shenzhen into an international hub, added Ding, who also serves as CEO of HNA Aviation Group.

"In collaboration with the Shenzhen Baoan airport and other units, Hainan Airlines will grow with Shenzhen to assist the city in building itself into a national socialist demonstration zone with Chinese characteristics, help the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area join the ranks of the world's top bay areas and city clusters, and promote coordinated development between the Hainan Free Trade Port and the Bay Area," Ding said.

Among those in attendance at the ceremony were Chan Yaodong, deputy secretary-general of the Shenzhen city government; Valerio de Parolis, consul general of Italy in Guangzhou, Guangdong province; and Zhu Enping, board chairman of Shenzhen Airport Group.

Company executives and government officials attend the international flight resumption ceremony on May 26 in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Hainan Airlines announced it would operate one round-trip flight using the Boeing 787 widebody aircraft twice a week on Thursdays and Sundays on the Shenzhen-Rome route, with economy class one-way fares starting at 2,000 yuan ($284), which excludes taxes.

The airline plans to start resuming another two international routes from Shenzhen to Auckland, New Zealand, on June 17 and to Brussels, Belgium on June 21.

The round-trip flight service linking Shenzhen and Auckland will be offered twice a week on Tuesdays and Saturdays, and that a service linking Shenzhen and Brussels will be available on Wednesdays and Sundays, according to the company.

By then, Hainan Airlines will operate six international air routes starting from Shenzhen. The three others that have been in service before connect to Vancouver, Canada; Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and Paris, France.

Also, the airline operates a widespread domestic flight network from Shenzhen, covering 30 air routes.

The company operates nearly 30 international and regional round-trip passenger routes in eight Chinese cities. In addition to Shenzhen, the cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Haikou, Chongqing, Xi'an, Changsha and Guangzhou are in its international flight service landscape.

As a five-star airline on the Chinese mainland by international air transport rating organization Skytrax, Hainan Airlines said it is committed to providing passengers with "safe, convenient and comfortable flight experiences" and boosting the high-quality development of China's aviation industry.

Roundup

PASSENGER TRAFFIC SURGES

China handled 780 million passenger trips via commercial transport in April, a surge of 141.1 percent year-on-year, said the Ministry of Transport on Tuesday. Among all types of commercial transport, road trips increased 49.7 percent to 380 million, while the number of waterway trips soared 403.7 percent to 21.76 million, data from the ministry showed. A total of 8.24 billion passenger trips were made in urban areas in April, an expansion of 47.9 percent year-on-year.

LEAP IN HOTEL GUESTS

A total of 1.1 million guests checked in to Macao's hotel establishments in April, leaping 199 percent year-on-year, Macao's statistics department said on Monday. The latest Statistics and Census Service report showed guests from the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong jumped by 202.2 percent and 1,171.4 percent year-on-year to 739,000 and 254,000, respectively. The number of visitors arriving on package tours totaled 97,000 in April, while a total of 34,000 Macao residents purchased outbound services through travel agencies, surging 1,580.1 percent year-on-year.

AIRLINE'S BASE IN SHENZHEN

China Southern Airlines has started building its new base in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, with a total investment of 2.4 billion yuan ($340.84 million). With a total floor area of 338,000 square meters, the base will have facilities for flight operation, aircraft maintenance, and cargo transportation and logistics, including an international cargo terminal, workshops for flight and maintenance technological innovations, and a laboratory for passenger cabin emergency response, according to the airline.

VALLEY GETAWAY

Phoenix River Yixing opened its doors to the public on Wednesday. The new hotel operated by Wanda Hotels & Resorts is tucked away in the 400-hectare Phoenix River valley in Yixing, Jiangsu province. Featuring bamboo forests, tea plantations, winding streams and riverside views, the hotel provides an ideal venue for holidaymakers, gourmets, family tourists, outdoor enthusiasts, wedding organizers and those that enjoy leisure activities and healthcare services, its executives said.

ADVENTURE IN FANTAWILD

Shenyang Fantawild Resort is staging its Bonnie Bears Children's Day running from Thursday to Sunday. On the opening day, more than 100 families took part in a parent-child run and other challenging yet fun family activities, interacted with Bonnie Bears characters and enjoyed the pleasant family get-together time, creating their own memorable moments.

SUMMER FLAVOR

To usher in the arrival of the summer season, Paulaner Brauhaus Beijing in Kempinski Hotel Beijing Yansha Center has unveiled a new a la carte menu with more than a dozen new dishes, created by Executive Sous Chef Maik Lilienthal and Executive Chef Daniel Leibssle. The menu features an array of authentic Bavarian sharing platters, chef's specials, snacks and renewed homebrewed beers.

XINHUA-CHINA DAILY

WORLD

Briefly

CHINA

Special envoy to attend Erdogan's inauguration

Ding Zhongli, President Xi Jinping's special envoy and vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, will attend Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's inauguration ceremony in Ankara on Saturday, according to the Foreign Ministry. China and Turkiye established diplomatic relations in 1971 and a strategic cooperative relationship in 2010. Bilateral trade exceeded $38.5 billion last year, with a 12.6 percent increase year-on-year.

MIDDLE EAST

Toddler critically wounded in West Bank

A 3-year-old Palestinian boy was in critical condition at an Israeli hospital on Friday morning after being shot by Israeli fire in the occupied West Bank. The army opened an investigation into what it said was an unintentional shooting. In a statement, the military said that gunmen opened fire late on Thursday toward the West Bank settlement of Neve Tzuf. It said soldiers at a guard post returned fire. The shooting was the latest bloodshed in a more than yearlong surge of violence in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. That fighting has picked up since Israel's new government took office in December.

UNITED NATIONS

WMO set to have first woman leader

The World Meteorological Organization voted on Thursday for Argentina's Celeste Saulo to become its first woman leader and steer the WMO's critical global role in tracking climate change. Saulo, a WMO vice-president who has headed Argentina's weather service since 2014, won a landslide vote at the UN climate and weather agency's congress in Geneva. The WMO's role in climate change has become increasingly prominent and Saulo, 59, will likely become a well-known advocate on this pressing world issue. She will take over from the outgoing Secretary-General Petteri Taalas on Jan 1.

JAPAN

ChatGPT's maker warned on user data

Japan's privacy watchdog said on Friday it had warned OpenAI, the Microsoft-backed startup behind the ChatGPT chatbot, not to collect sensitive data without people's permission. OpenAI should minimize the sensitive data it collects for machine learning, the Personal Information Protection Commission said in a statement, adding it may take further action if it has more concerns. Japan is the third-largest source of traffic to OpenAI's website, according to analytics firm Similarweb.

CHINA DAILY—AGENCIES

Royal cruise

Jordanians line up along a street in Amman, Jordan, on Thursday as Jordan's Crown Prince Hussein and Saudi Arabian architect Rajwa Al-Saif drive pass in their motorcade on the day of their royal wedding. The wedding was attended by many Arab and foreign dignitaries. ROYAL HASHEMITE COURT VIA AFP

Senate races to debt deal finish line

WASHINGTON — US senators voted to suspend the federal debt limit on Thursday, the 103rd time since 1945, capping weeks of fraught negotiations to eliminate the threat of a disastrous credit default just four days ahead of the deadline set by the Treasury.

Economists had warned the United States could run out of money to pay its bills by Monday — leaving almost no room for delays in enacting the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which extends the government's borrowing authority through 2024 while trimming federal spending.

Hammered out between Democratic President Joe Biden and the Republicans, the measure passed the Senate with a comfortable majority of 63 votes to 36 a day after it had sailed through the House of Representatives.

"No one gets everything they want in a negotiation, but make no mistake: This bipartisan agreement is a big win for our economy and the American people," Biden said in a statement posted on social media.

He said he would sign the bill "as soon as possible" and address the nation later on Friday.

Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer added that the nation could "breathe a sigh of relief" after avoiding a "catastrophic" economic collapse.

The bill, which now heads to Biden's desk to be signed into law, ended a day of intense back-and-forth between party leaders and rank-and-file members who had threatened the bill's quick passage with last-minute gripes about the details.

Democratic leaders had spent months underlining the havoc that a first default in history would have brought, including the loss of millions of jobs and $15 trillion in household wealth, as well as increased costs for mortgages and other borrowing.

The final vote of 63-36 shows passage of the bill to raise the debt ceiling on Thursday night in the Senate in Washington.
SENATE TELEVISION VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

The late evening drama came after a series of failed ballots on amendments sought mainly by Republicans who were threatening at one point to hold up the process, dragging it deep into the weekend.

The US spends more money than it collects through taxation, so it borrows money via the issuing of government bonds. Around 80 years ago, lawmakers introduced a limit on how much federal debt could be accrued.

Politically toxic

The ceiling has been raised more than 100 times since to allow the government to meet its spending commitments — usually without drama and with the support of Democrats and Republicans — and stands at around $31.5 trillion.

Both parties see raising the debt limit as politically toxic, although they acknowledge that failure to do so would plunge the US economy into a depression and roil world markets as the government missed debt repayments.

Republicans hoped to weaponize the extension to campaign against what they see as Democratic overspending ahead of the 2024 presidential election, although hikes in the debt ceiling only cover commitments already made by both parties.

Kevin McCarthy, the top lawmaker in the Republican-led House of Representatives, had touted the bill he spent weeks negotiating as a big victory for conservatives, although he faced a backlash from hard-liners on the right who said he made too many concessions on spending cuts.

On the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, the vote was being touted as a major victory for Biden, who managed to protect almost all of his domestic priorities from deep cuts threatened by Republicans.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Hebei aims for more trade with Europe

Unique advantages of train transport foster relations with BRI countries

By **ZHAO RUINAN** in Shijiazhuang
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Carrying 110 standard containers loaded with garments, power generators, refrigerators and various goods, a China-Europe Railway Express freight train embarked on its journey from Shijiazhuang International Land Port at 3 pm on Monday. The train is expected to reach its destination Budapest, Hungary's capital, in approximately 20 days.

This has become a typical scene at the Shijiazhuang port since the first China-Europe freight train departed from the port in Hebei province in June 2018.

The port has become a vital player in the Belt and Road Initiative, which connects the city to Europe, said Hu Shuguo, head of the department of foreign capital and overseas investment under the Hebei Development and Reform Commission, stating that this integration has ushered in a new chapter for Shijiazhuang.

He emphasized the pivotal role played by the China-Europe Railway Express in building an open economy since its opening.

"Under the framework of the BRI, the China-Europe Railway Express has fostered connections and exchanges with countries along the route," he said. "Additionally, it has stimulated local industries, particularly the development of export-oriented enterprises, thereby fulfilling local export demands."

Serving as an alternative to container shipping, the railway transports a wide range of Chinese goods, including clothing, household appliances and car parts, to European consumers.

Official data showed that the Shijiazhuang port has 14 international routes, covering more than 50 countries and regions. By 2022, the number of trains dispatched from the port has increased by 140 percent compared to the previous year, surpassing the total of the past four years. A total of 49,320 standard containers, weighing 488,000 metric tons and valued at 10.1 billion yuan ($1.43 billion), have been transported via the railway.

Experts have highlighted the unique advantages of transporting goods by train, such as the lower costs compared to air transport and the significantly reduced time compared to sea transport, making it a more cost-effective mode of transportation.

Liu Ruiling, chairman of the Hebei Land Port Group, emphasized the strong complementarity between Hebei's economy and countries along the BRI route.

"The operation of the China-Europe Railway Express in Shijiazhuang has established trade channels and facilitated exchanges between Hebei and these countries, accelerating Hebei's integration into the international market," Liu said.

Qiao Xiaolin, deputy director of the Hebei Development and Reform Commission, acknowledged the remarkable growth and important role of the express in promoting China's trade connectivity and cooperation with Europe.

The express has contributed to closer exchanges between China and central and eastern Europe, said Qiao, citing the China-Central and Eastern European (Cangzhou) SME Cooperation Forum as another example of closer ties.

Zhao Yongsheng, a professor at the Institute of Regional and International Studies at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, emphasized the significant contribution of the China-Europe railway to strengthening international economic and trade ties and ensuring the stability of global industrial and supply chains.

New trend

Zhao said there is a new trend emerging from China's engagement with Europe.

"The China-Europe Railway Express is expanding. Initially focused on western European countries with a limited number of trains and routes, there have been flourishing cross-continent networks and the deployment of more trains due to increasing trade and cultural exchanges between China and central and eastern European countries in recent years," Zhao said.

This year marks the beginning of the second decade of China-CEEC cooperation. Since 2012, China's trade with CEECs has grown at an average annual rate of 8.1 percent, and China's imports from CEECs have increased at an average rate of 9.2 percent annually.

Zhao said closer ties between China and central and eastern European countries will deepen mutual cooperation, as the two sides have tremendous potential for trade and investment.

"Against the backdrop of a global economic downturn and sluggish trade, the trade volume between China and central and eastern European countries has continuously reached new heights," Zhao said.

Washington criticized for deal with Taiwan

By **ZHOU JIN**
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Beijing on Friday urged Washington to immediately revoke an initiative aimed at boosting trade relations with Taiwan, warning that the United States will bear all consequences if it continues to send wrong signals to "Taiwan independence" separatist forces.

The oppositions were made as several departments strongly deplored the so-called first agreement under the "US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade", which was signed on Thursday.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said that China has lodged solemn representations to the US over the deal, which contravenes Washington's commitment of maintaining only unofficial relations with Taiwan.

Under the pretext of trade cooperation, the so-called initiative is a tool for the US to "rip Taiwan off", and it is the latest example of the US' attempts to "fudge and hollow out" the one-China principle, Mao said.

By signing the so-called deal, the Democratic Progressive Party, or DPP, authorities are offering Taiwan on a plate to the US, she said.

She added that the US must refrain from pushing forward the so-called initiative and agreement.

The Ministry of Commerce said Beijing opposes negotiating or signing any pact of sovereign implication or with official nature between China's Taiwan region and countries that have diplomatic ties with China.

A spokesperson urged the US to abide by the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiques, prudently deal with its trade relations with Taiwan and stop any form of official exchanges with the island.

Zhu Fenglian, spokeswoman for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, said that the DPP authorities have no scruples to sell out the interests of Taiwan people and businesses to seek the so-called achievements in a relationship with the US.

Such a move goes against the will of the Taiwan people, and will only harm the DPP itself as well as Taiwan, she added.

Russia repels attempted cross-border incursion

MOSCOW — Russia said it had repelled an attempted incursion along its border with Ukraine by what it casts as pro-Ukrainian militants, while heavy shelling and a suspected drone attack prompted a partial evacuation of civilians from the area.

Russia has come under repeated attack in recent days, including a major cross-border incursion and the biggest-ever drone attack on Moscow.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it had repelled three cross-border attacks on Thursday near the town of Shebekino, and it accused Ukraine of using "terrorist formations" to carry out attempted attacks on Russian civilians.

"The selfless actions of Russian servicemen repelled three attacks by Ukrainian terrorist formations," the Russian ministry said. "No violations of the state border were allowed."

Ukraine denied its military was involved in the incursions into Belgorod.

Moscow blames Ukrainian "terrorists" for targeting Russia's western border. Russian officials said the group of fighters is a proxy run by Ukraine.

Russian army units, border guards and units of the Federal Security Service repelled the first attack at around 0100 GMT as two units with vehicles and tanks tried to penetrate the border near Novaya Tavolzhanka and Shebekino, said the Defense Ministry, adding there were three attacks from the Ukrainian side.

More than 50 Ukrainian fighters were killed and four armored vehicles were destroyed, the ministry said. It added that up to 70 fighters, five tanks and four armored vehicles were involved in the attack.

Zero condemnation

The Kremlin said President Vladimir Putin was being regularly briefed on the situation at the border and noted that Western powers had refrained from condemning the attacks on Russian territory that it said Ukraine had carried out.

"As before, there is not a single word of criticism for the Kyiv regime — or any condemnation," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

The attacks on Belgorod, Peskov said, would have absolutely no impact on the course of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

In the Belgorod region, Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said Ukraine's armed forces had shelled Shebekino with Soviet-designed Grad 122mm rockets, setting alight a dormitory and damaging an administrative building.

People, evacuated from the Shebekino district of Belgorod region after massive shelling, are seen at the Belgorod-Arena stadium in Belgorod, Russia, on Thursday. ANTON VERGUN / SPUTNIK

Two civilians were killed in shelling across the region on Friday. Video footage posted on social media showed plumes of smoke rising above a large building in Shebekino as flames licked through the destroyed roof.

Meanwhile, according to a report by Reuters, the United States is seeking to secure supplies of TNT from Japan for 155mm artillery shells, as Washington rushes weapons and ammunition to Ukraine for a counteroffensive against Russian forces, two people familiar with the matter said.

"There is a way for the US to buy explosives from Japan," one of the two people with knowledge of discussions on the matter in Japan said on condition of anonymity, citing the issue's sensitivity.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

WORLD

Demand rising for intl schools in Africa

Growing middle class willing to pay premium for their children's education

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya
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Demand for international schools in Africa is set to double over the next decade with a rising expat population and increasing interest from local families.

According to a study released by Czech research company International Schools Database, English-medium international schools in Africa could increase to more than 1,500 from the current 700 in the next decade, with students reaching 625,000 by 2025.

Janet Ouko, chief executive of Kenyan nonprofit Elimu Yetu Coalition, said international schools used to be seen as a reserve for diplomats and other expatriates, but recent trends indicate that wealthy locals and parents who want their children to further their studies abroad are showing increased interest.

Ouko said international schools depend on recruiting good, experienced and qualified expat teachers, which translates to competitive salaries. This is in addition to other benefits like medical insurance, housing allowance or flights back home during breaks, meaning that the schools have to charge a higher fee than local schools.

However, despite many Africans finding the cost of international schools to be high, the International Schools Database study revealed that Africa continues to offer the lowest costs for international tuition compared to other regions in the world.

After comparing the prices of international schools in 76 cities around the world, the study found that all the six African cities in the study are among 20 cities with the cheapest international schools in the world.

"Nairobi in Kenya is the most expensive destination in Africa for international education. It also offers the biggest spread of prices, from a minimum of $935 per year to a maximum of almost $31,000 per year," the study stated.

"South Africa's Cape Town remains the least expensive city in Africa when it comes to international school costs and it is the second-least expensive destination in the world. In contrast to Nairobi, Cape Town has the smallest spread of prices from a minimum of $2,203 to a maximum of $5,634."

Alternative curriculum

John Onala, a consultant in developmental and learning disabilities from Kenya, said one of the reasons international schools is becoming increasingly attractive to the local population in Africa is because they offer an alternative curriculum where students are exposed to varied skills like entrepreneurship, leadership, filming and scriptwriting, cryptocurrency and career development courses. This is in addition to a growing middle class that is willing to pay a premium for their kids to attain these new age skills.

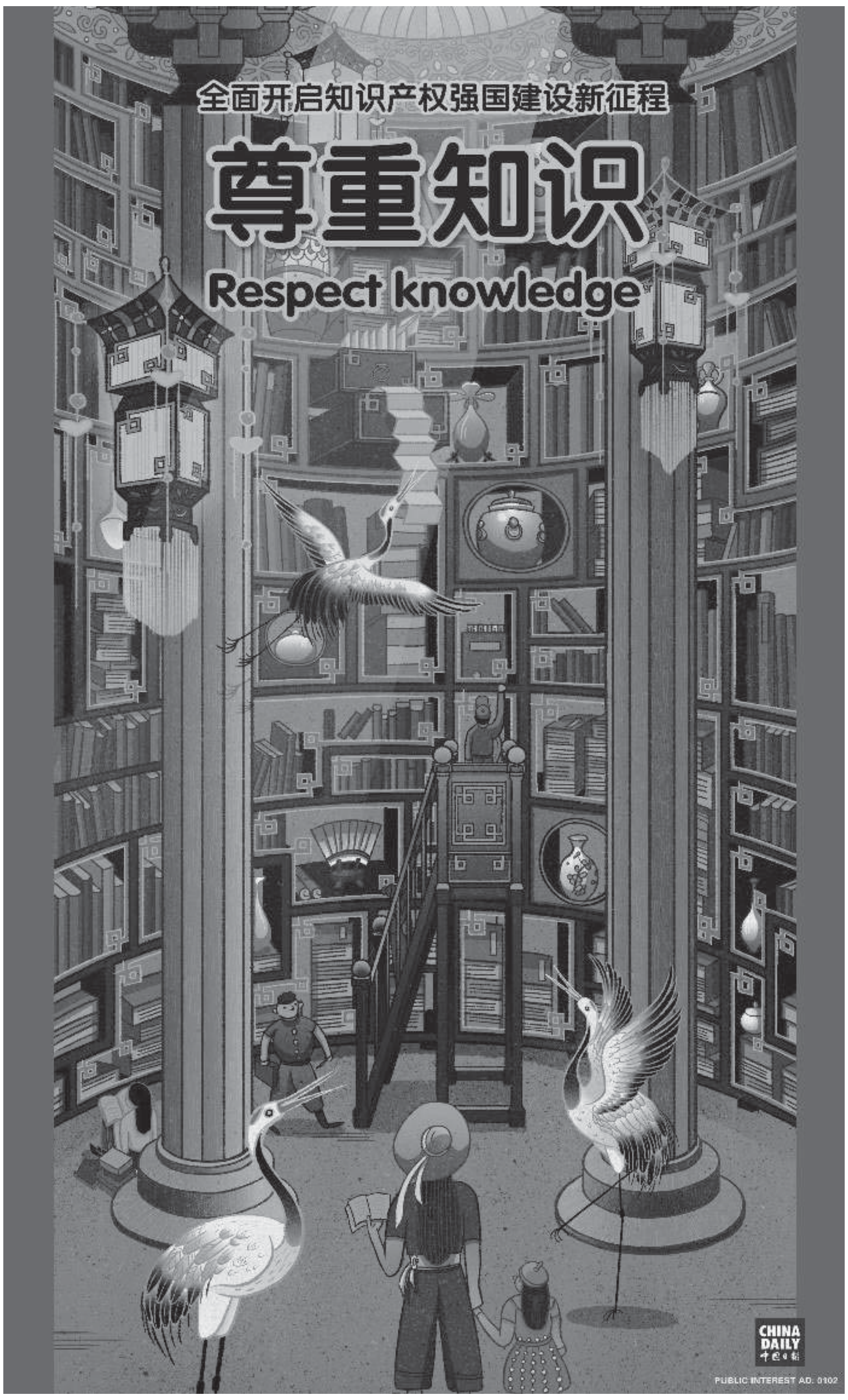
"Besides offering new age courses, there has been a growing allure of the international schools' amenities such as use of webcams for hybrid teaching, smartboards, design and technology facilities, music and art rooms, as well as amphitheaters. The schools also have extra teachers to support pupils with physical and learning challenges," Onala said.

Being a special needs specialist, he added that most international schools have set up departments dedicated to meeting the special needs of their learners who can be pulled out of the classroom for a few minutes to work on specific challenges such as reading, spelling, mathematics and language skills. Some schools also offer special sessions in the classroom by inviting specialists in specific fields or organizing individualized education programs.

Ouko pointed out that Africa has seen exponential growth in the past two decades and this has led to a significant increase in foreigners working and doing business on the continent. This has led to the increased demand for international schools, which are set up to meet their needs that local education systems cannot provide.

By looking at the differences in curriculum and the target market, Ouko said it would be unfair to compare the cost of international schools in Africa with local schools. In her view, African governments should encourage the establishment of more international schools as a way of attracting expats and foreign investors, while giving local learners a chance to gain exposure to a more global mode of learning.

"Quality education that better enables graduates to find places in colleges and universities, both locally and abroad, is a key factor why an increasing number of local families are sending their children to international schools," Ouko said.



Nonprofit Enaleia's divers and volunteers collect ghost nets under the water during a cleanup operation near the coast of the island of Salamina on May 26. ANGELOS TZORTZINIS / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

'Swimming in plastic': Greek fishermen clean up seabed litter

KERATSINI, Greece — In the west of the Greek capital Athens, the fish market of Keratsini is abuzz early in the morning, with trawlers disgorging crates of sardines and anchovies as trucks await nearby to be loaded.

But on his family's fishing boat, Lefteris Arapakis sorts out a different sort of haul — bottles, boots, plastic pipes and fishing nets, all dragged from the bed of the Aegean Sea.

"We are swimming in plastic," said Arapakis, whose family has fished for five generations.

By 2050, "there will be more plastic than fish" in the sea, he said, quoting recent reports.

That morning's plastic catch weighed "about 100 kilograms", said the 29-year-old economist and co-founder of Enaleia, a nonprofit that encourages fishermen to collect marine litter caught in their nets.

Since its establishment in 2018, it has worked with more than 1,200 fishermen in Greece to raise awareness over the degradation of the maritime environment.

The seabed litter does not come only from Greece, but from all over the Mediterranean, moving with the sea currents.

Active in 42 ports throughout Greece, Enaleia provides fishermen with large bags for marine waste that they can deposit in dumpsters once back at port.

For every kilogram of plastic they deliver, they receive a small "symbolic" sum. The money is enough for a drink, said Arapakis, who was in Paris this week for global talks on limiting plastic pollution.

Representatives of 175 nations met at the UNESCO headquarters with the aim of making progress toward reaching an agreement by next year covering the entire plastics life cycle.

Fancy transformation

Since October, fishing crews affiliated with Enaleia have dragged out 20 metric tons of plastic and old fishing equipment each month. Nearly 600 tons have been collected over the last five years, it said.

The collected plastic is transported to a recycling plant in the industrial area of Megara near Keratsini, to be turned into pellets to make new products such as socks, swimwear or furniture.

One-sixth is fishing nets. Next in line are high- and low-density plastics at 12.5 percent and 8 percent respectively.

But nearly half of the total, 44 percent, is nonrecyclable plastic.

Recycling marine waste is a "challenge" because the plastic is degraded by its exposure underwater, said Hana Pertot, sales manager of the Skyplast recycling plant in Megara.

Arapakis said he embarked on the Mediterranean Cleanup project after a trip to Greece's Cyclades islands, where he saw fishermen throwing the waste gathered by their nets back into the sea.

He is convinced there has been a "mentality change" among Greece's fishermen.

Previously, "we caught large quantities of plastic, but we only kept the fish. All waste was thrown into the sea", said Mokhtar Mokharam, team leader on the Arapakis family's boat.

There are also practical benefits for fishing boats.

"In the past, the anchor often snagged on waste of all kinds, especially nets, and the engine would go out," said Nikolaos Mentis, who works out of Salamina island opposite Keratsini, and has been an Enaleia contributor for the past five years.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Resistance to reform

Protesters clash with gendarmes during a demonstration against the pension reform in Millau, southern France, on Thursday. Eager to turn the page on months of protests against his plans to raise the retirement age by two years to 64, President Emmanuel Macron promised last month to cut taxes on the middle class by 2 billion euros ($2.2 billion). CHARLY TRIBALLEAU / AFP

Inflation rate falls in EU's top economy

By JONATHAN POWELL
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Germany's inflation rate dropped to 6.1 percent in May, according to data published by federal statistics office Destatis on Wednesday.

While the latest figures from Europe's biggest economy mark a slight decrease from its 7.2 percent inflation rate seen in April, the European Central Bank, or ECB, has cautioned that the eurozone still faces persistent vulnerabilities, Agence France-Presse reported.

Surging energy prices in Germany, driven by the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict last year, eased considerably, with prices rising by a mere 2.6 percent, Destatis said.

The office reported that overall consumer prices have steadily decreased for the past three months, after inflation in Germany had peaked at 10 percent late last year, and stayed above 8 percent from August last year to March.

Destatis said that while government relief measures contributed to a decline in energy prices from their recent highs, helping to alleviate the impact on both consumers and businesses, the cost of groceries continued to climb at a faster rate in May, compared to the previous year.

Food prices are currently the main driver of inflation and continued to show "above average growth", Destatis said. In May, the annual increase in food prices was measured at 14.9 percent, down from 22.3 percent in March.

The ECB warned in a report released on Wednesday that the tightening credit conditions resulting from higher interest rates aimed at combating inflation are "testing the resilience" of households and businesses in the eurozone.

"As we tighten monetary policy to reduce high inflation, this can reveal vulnerabilities in the financial system," ECB Vice-President Luis de Guindos said in a statement accompanying its Financial Stability Review.

Eurozone inflation remained stubbornly high in April at 7 percent, exceeding the ECB's 2 percent target rate.

In a bid to rein in steeply escalating consumer prices across the 20-nation currency club, the ECB has hiked its benchmark interest rates by 3.75 percentage points since July last year.

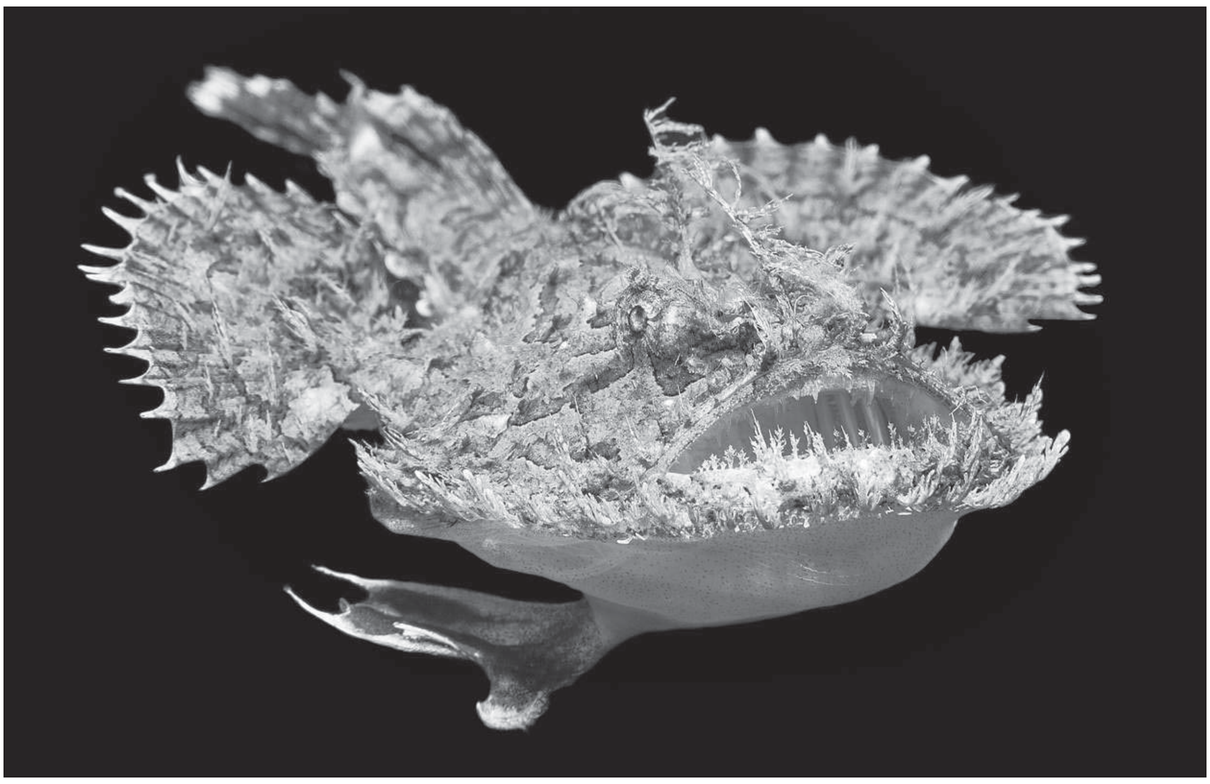
This move stands in contrast to the almost 15 years of historically low rates, hovering around 0 percent, that followed the global financial crisis.

The rationale behind such interest rate hikes is to discourage borrowing and spending by making it more expensive. However, there is an associated risk that these measures might curb economic growth if they prove too effective.

Official data released last week revealed that the German economy shrank for the second consecutive quarter, meeting the technical definition of a recession.

The country's gross domestic product fell by 0.3 percent in the January-March period, following a 0.5-percent drop in the final quarter of last year.

LIFE



The monkfish, which inhabits the deep sea, has developed a rock-like appearance to disguise it from attackers. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Wave of innovation shows a world of wonder

Author inspired by creativity behind deep-sea submersible technology and the wonders it revealed, **Yang Yang** reports.

More than 20 years ago, when Gao Zhongtai was a reporter in Wuxi, East China's Jiangsu province, he started following news about the research and development of China's deep-sea manned submersibles at the China Ship Scientific Research Center.

The Wuxi-based center, China's largest ship and ocean engineering research institute, is behind the success of the country's three deep-sea manned submersibles: *Jiaolong* (Sea Dragon), *Shenhai Yongshi* (Deep Sea Warrior) and *Fendouzhe* (Striver).

Gao conducted interviews with the key scientists and engineers. However, his reporting was never going to get the story behind the story, or the intricate details about the research and development.

That is why Gao, in his 60s, wrote the book *Shenqian* (Diving Deep), published earlier this year, in which he recorded how scientists and engineers had developed the world's most advanced deep-sea manned submersibles in the last 20 years, starting from scratch.

Before *Shenqian*, Gao published nonfiction works like *Dying to Survive*, about a leukemia patient trying to save himself and other cancer patients by illegally buying generic drugs from India, and history novels set in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) and the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). He is also a TV series screenwriter.

Since *Fendouzhe*, China's most advanced deep-sea manned submersible, successfully traveled to the Mariana Trench in the western Pacific Ocean, the deepest natural frontier on Earth, in 2020, Gao has always wanted to write a book about this feat.

Although he had been following the news for decades, he still found it difficult to understand the science and technology used on deep-sea manned submersibles. He spent a great deal of time trying to figure it out. To better discuss the motivation of exploring the ocean, he also researched more about the sea.

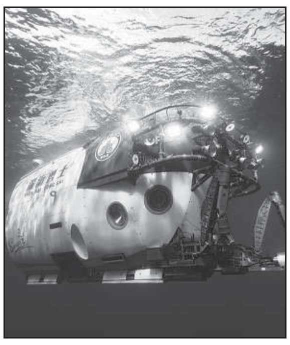
"If you know little about these two points, it'll be very difficult to write the book," he says.

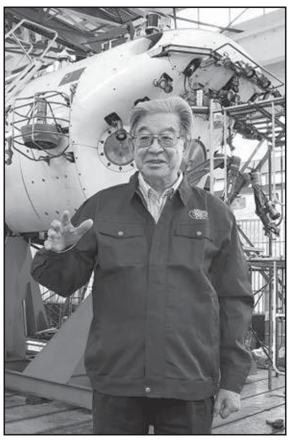
Last year, with materials and interviews accumulated over the years, Gao completed the book in three months, trying to "dive deep into three questions" — human ideas about the ocean, why China develops advanced deep-sea manned submersibles, and the key technical challenges.

"Basically, there are three technical questions: how to dive, how to ascend from the deep sea, and how to communicate with the outside world," Gao says.

Take the giant titanium spherical cabin for example. Ideally, it should be lightweight yet withstand the high pressure trying to crush it in the abyss, while being big enough to carry three pilots and allow them to conduct their activities.

> "The resources on land are limited. Humans have to explore the ocean, which accounts for 71 percent of the surface of our planet, and make use of it — perhaps in the future, even find a way to live in it, due to the explosive growth in the global population."
>
> **Gao Zhongtai,** writer





Top: China's deep-sea manned submersible *Shenhai Yongshi*. **Middle:** Ye Cong, one of the pilots of submersible *Jiaolong*, checks equipment before a deep-sea voyage. **Above:** Xu Qi'nan, *Jiaolong*'s chief engineer, poses in front of the vehicle.

As the vehicles dive into deeper water, the surface of the cabin will take increasing pressure, and in the Mariana Trench, the pressure is 1,100 times of that on the ground.

When Chinese scientists started developing the country's first deep-sea manned submersible *Jiaolong* in 2003, they did not even know what shape the vehicle should look like. The chief designer Xu Qi'nan, born in 1936, once worked on a submarine, and based on this experience, he estimated that the submersible should also be streamlined, says Gao.

At the start of the century, China was short of talent specializing in submersibles. Xu, a retired engineer returning from the United States, decided to nurture a research team and entrusted 12 young people with major tasks.

One of them was 24-year-old Ye Cong. At university, Ye studied ship engineering and before joining the team, his only experience with related research was his participation in the development of a submarine rescue ship that could dive to a depth of 600 meters.

Knowing nearly nothing about deep-sea manned submersibles, Ye got a vague idea about the possible contours of the vehicle by repeatedly watching Hollywood blockbuster *Titanic*.

The *Jiaolong* deep-sea submersible, with a 7,500-meter dive capacity, entered service in 2010, making China the fifth country in the world to have deep-sea exploration technology, after the United States, France, Russia and Japan. However, many of the key parts were created in foreign countries, including the metal sphere which was created in Russia.

Despite the success of *Jiaolong*, rather than directly develop a submersible that can reach the Mariana Trench, Chinese scientists decided to first create one using entirely domestic know-how that is capable of reaching a depth of 4,500 meters. Submersible *Shenhai Yongshi* was delivered to the Chinese Academy of Sciences in late 2017, conducting intensive scientific operations.

On Nov 10, 2020, *Fendouzhe*, carrying three people, dived to a depth of 10,909 meters in Challenger Deep, an 11,000-meter chasm located at the bottom of the Mariana Trench.

Fendouzhe was a significant improvement over its predecessors in almost every respect, including descending and ascending speeds, material toughness and battery capacity.

"But there is still big space for improvement. Now Chinese researchers are working on communication networks that can facilitate accurate positioning of submersibles in the deep sea," Gao says.

Another goal is to improve the submersibles' capacities to travel greater distances and stay longer underwater. Currently, *Fendouzhe* can stay six hours in the Mariana Trench, Gao says.

Besides, Chinese scientists hope to create larger cabins so as to carry five pilots for comprehensive scientific voyages with a better living environment.

While writing the book, Gao was impressed by the "black chimneys" found on the sea bed. They are basically mini volcanoes, superheating the water as they discharge minerals, metals and gases — at temperatures ranging between 200 C and 400 C — into the bitterly cold deep ocean from below the seafloor. They are also home to many living organisms.

"It amazed me that living creatures exist in such hot water," he says. "It's like another life system. Maybe it can provide another theory about where human beings come from."

He was also deeply impressed by the courage of Wang Pinxian, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. In 2018, 82-year-old Wang took the *Jiaolong* submersible and dived to the depth of 1,400 meters in the South China Sea three times within nine days and made many important scientific discoveries.

"There are many younger scientists who would not dare to make such a dive," Gao says.

For him, to explore the ocean is vitally important for the survival and development of human beings.

"The resources on land are limited. Humans have to explore the ocean, which accounts for 71 percent of the surface of our planet, and make use of it — perhaps in the future, even find a way to live in it, due to the explosive growth in the global population," he says.

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Ceramic pillow awakens dance drama

By **CHEN NAN**
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For centuries, the Ding Kiln in today's Quyang county, North China's Hebei province, produced white ceramics and was considered one of ancient China's "five great kilns".

The traditional technique of the Ding Kiln thrived in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).

One of its most prized works from the dynasty is the baby-shaped pillow in ivory-white glaze, known as *hai'er zhen*, which is about 18.3 centimeters tall, 30 cm long and 11.8 cm wide.

It is one of the national treasures housed at the Palace Museum in Beijing.

The porcelain pillow portrays a baby boy lying on his belly, which is patterned with flowers and clouds, implying auspiciousness. The baby's back is where people rest their heads.

The pillow has become the theme of a homonymous dance drama production that will be premiered in 2024, and followed by 150 shows around the country, the China Oriental Performing Arts Group announced in Beijing on May 25.

"The new dance drama will highlight traditional cultural elements from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and the pillow will be a major inspiration," says Jing Xiaoyong, head of the company. "The Ding kilns and their porcelain-firing technique will be introduced to the audience."

Jing adds that the company has produced and staged the dance drama, *Poetic Dance: The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, which proved to be a success. Since its premiere in Beijing in 2021, the dance drama, which was inspired by the classic painting, *A Panorama of Rivers and Mountains*, by Northern Song Dynasty artist Wang Ximeng, has seen more than 240 sold-out shows. It plans to tour nationwide, with 120 shows, later this year.

"With the success of *Poetic Dance: The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, we have seen the enthusiasm of the Chinese audience, especially the young people, who are very interested in traditional Chinese culture," says Jing.

"Their warm feedback made the dance drama a phenomenon in the country, which gave us the confidence to make another dance drama based on traditional Chinese culture."

Drama *Hai'er Zhen* will gather creative members from the company, including choreographers Li Li and Jin Miaomiao. Scholars and experts on the Ding kilns were also invited to be consultants.

According to Lyu Chenglong, a researcher at the Palace Museum in Beijing, porcelain objects from the Ding kilns had the reputation of being "thin as paper, white as jade". In 2008, the Ding Kiln porcelain firing technique was listed as an item of national intangible cultural heritage.

"The ceramics collection at the Palace Museum in Beijing is huge and has included a wide range of varieties, allowing people to see and understand a continuous development of the artifacts.

> "With the success of *Poetic Dance: The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, we have seen the enthusiasm of the Chinese audience, especially the young people, who are very interested in traditional Chinese culture."

Jing Xiaoyong, head of the China Oriental Performing Arts Group

Among the major treasures, *hai'er zhen* is one of the best-known pieces of art, which displays the zenith of ancient Chinese aesthetics," says Lyu.

There are three original ceramic baby-shaped pillows made with the Ding Kiln porcelain-firing technique in existence in China now, Lyu adds: one housed at the Palace Museum in Beijing and the other two in Taipei's Palace Museum.

The technique, however, declined and disappeared in the chaos of the late Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). In 1922, Ye Linzhi (1888-1963), a historian of Chinese ceramics, discovered the Ding Kiln site in Quyang.

"Chinese ceramics spread to the rest of the world and nurtured local styles of porcelains. Now, Chinese artists have decoded the secrets of porcelain making and created modern works to keep the technique alive," Lyu adds.

The company also announced collaboration with the popular video-sharing site, Bilibili, which is considered as one of the most popular cultural platforms for young people, to launch an online recruitment for dancers of the drama.

Two popular influencers on Bilibili have been invited to join in the dance drama: Ziyan, who has nearly 840,000 followers on the platform, and Shi Tu Guan, who has over 1.7 million followers.

"Ziyan, who is a graduate of the Beijing Dance Academy and majored in traditional Chinese dance, is known for her original dance pieces," says Zhu Chengming, deputy Party secretary of Bilibili.

"Shi Tu Guan is known for sharing videos about Chinese history and traditional Chinese culture. We invited them to participate in the dance drama's creative process, hoping to attract more young audiences," says Zhu.

The China Oriental Performing Arts Group also announced that it will launch its first reality show by working with Jiangsu TV and Tencent Video in July, featuring dancers from dance schools around the country, as part of its effort on recruiting dancers for the dance drama.

Top: The creative team of the upcoming dance drama *Hai'er Zhen*. **Above:** The ancient baby-shaped pillow in ivory-white glaze, known as *hai'er zhen*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE

In seventh moon Fire Star west goes;
In ninth to make dress we are told.
In eleventh moon the wind blows;
In twelfth the weather is cold.
We have no warm garments to wear.
How can we get through the year?
In the first moon we mend our plough with care;
In the second our way afield we steer.
Our wives and children take the food
To southern fields; the overseer says, "Good!" ....

— the first stanza of the poem July (Life of Peasants), translated by Xu Yuanchong

A painting commissioned by Emperor Qianlong, based on Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) painter Ma Hezhi's previous interpretation of the poem *July* (picture digitally enhanced for clarity). It starts with two stargazers in the far right corner, continues with some farming scene, before ending with a gentlemen's gathering under a thatched roof. The painting is part of the collection of the Palace Museum in Taipei.

A poem of Qianlong's choosing

One particular painting seems to encapsulate the efforts of ancient rulers to gain a political and cultural mandate, **Zhao Xu** reports.

'A handscroll with me it has always been; a painting on the poem *July*, from the *Odes of Bin*," wrote Emperor Qianlong (1711-99) of the Qing Dynasty, possibly later in his long life, as he lamented in the same poem the changing of the seasons and the passage of time, of which he was reminded by "the sun's fast-traveling shadow across my latticed window".

It seems that this handscroll, which he almost certainly had gazed upon numerous times, had been a rare constant for a man who lived a volatile political life — something he clung to emotionally while doing his balancing act at the pinnacle of power.

In fact, there was not just one, but many scrolls in the emperor's possession that amounted to pictorial renditions of that same poem from the *Odes of Bin* — a collection of folk poem-songs, which, in turn, forms part of the *Book of Odes (Songs)*. The 305 pieces which make up the book, dated to the 400 years between the 11th to sixth century BC, are believed to have been collected from all over the country during the Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century-256 BC).

From when the *Book of Songs* became known as *Shi Jing* (Classic of Poetry), somewhere between the fourth and third century BC, until the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, it was avidly studied by generations of aspiring individuals eager to enter court service, and by rulers who genuinely cared about their subjects, or were eager to be seen as doing so.

Here comes the final piece of the jigsaw puzzle for anyone wondering why Emperor Qianlong, out of all the gems in his enviable art collection, had chosen to be associated with this particular handscroll. When the poem *July*, which opens with the sentence "In the seventh moon the Fire Star west goes", from which it took its title, appeared in its English version, Chinese translator Xu Yuanchong (1921-2021) titled it *Life of Peasants*. (The Fire Star is Antares, one of the brightest stars in the Scorpius constellation. In the West it's also called "Rival of Mars" due to its distinct reddish hue.)

For all who have gone through the poem's eight stanzas, Xu's English title is a fair summary of its content, centered on the yearly cycle of a perennially-hectic, if not backbreaking, farming life which, apart from sowing and plowing, also included picking mulberry leaves (for the silkworms), winemaking (for the elders and ancestors), hunting and skinning foxes to make fur (for the noblemen and women), and abode maintenance (so they could survive the coming winter, at the first hint of which, they would say the "Fire Star west goes").

Sense of pride

In pre-modern China, peasants constituted the overwhelming majority of the emperor's subjects. And agriculture, their livelihood, was the bedrock upon which the country stood. That's when the Qianlong poem stopped being a personal contemplation and started to be a thinly-veiled political statement — a portrait of a man whose thoughts had never wandered too far away from those most needing his attention.

However, if one listens to Wu Han from the National Library of China, Qianlong's enthusiasm for the poem-themed paintings may also be tied to a sense of pride that he was able to draw from marked parallels between the history of the founders of the Zhou Dynasty and that of his own.

"In the twelfth moon we hew out ice; in the first moon we store it deep," the poem's last stanza begins. Sixty-seven years before Qianlong was born, the triumphant Qing soldiers rode into Beijing, leaving behind their ancestral home in today's northeastern China, where fishing during long, harsh winters was only possible after one hewed out the ice on the frozen river.

Four times throughout his 60-year reign, the emperor visited Shengjing (modern-day Shenyang city in northeastern China), the one-time Qing capital before its rulers claimed themselves the emperors of China from Beijing's Forbidden City.

"The *Odes of Bin*, as its title clearly indicates, are folk poem-songs collected from the Bin area. Covering part of today's Shaanxi province, it was the ancestral home for the tribal Zhou people, who spread out from there to eventually overwhelm the once-invincible armies of the Shang Dynasty (c.16th century-11th century BC)," says Wu.

"For someone so conscious of his own legacy, the comparison was obvious. The poem reminded the emperor of the remarkable journey of his ancestors, one that he intended to honor by fulfilling the role of a diligent and benevolent ruler."

In fact, the concept of the right to rule based on the benignity of the rulers was first spelled out during the Zhou Dynasty, founded as much on moral grounds as on the debris of war. This ideological position explained why the Zhou Dynasty was much emulated, even by its distant successors, and why the rulers of Zhou had designated officials whose role was to collect and document folk ballads from around the empire.

Deemed to be the best gauge of the true sentiments of commoners and their living conditions, the ballads used to be sung by those who were most likely to be illiterate — thus the *Book of Songs*. While the music was no longer extant, the lyrics, thanks in part to royal efforts, survived and caught the attention of Confucius (551-479 BC), who agonized over what he saw as a plain disregard for ethics by his contemporaries and sought to remedy that, partly through championing the study of noble texts.

Although modern scholars remain divided over whether Confucius whittled an original collection of over 3,000 pieces down to the 305 we now know, it's commonly agreed that the philosopher, who once told his only son that "if you don't read the *Book of Songs*, then you really have nothing (meaningful) to say", was personally involved in the collection's editing and promulgation. (It's worth noting that the poetic value of the existing works of *Shi Jing*, which enabled them to be called poem-songs, and the stylistic consistency among them, had led renowned German American Sinologist Hans Frankel to believe that the works had "passed through the hands of men of letters".)

Different renditions

The collection received its canonization and came to be known as *Shi Jing* at the enshrinement of Confucius and his thoughts in the ensuing era. For two millennia, it has been an unquestionable classic and a foundational text, which not only informed and inspired, but also validated every aspect of ancient Chinese society, from family life and education to politics and statecraft.

A portrait of Emperor Qianlong (1711-99). PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> "... some of highly-detailed versions of the *July* paintings also functioned as picture books for aristocratic youth who were otherwise out of touch with the described way of existence."
>
> **Wu Han,** researcher from the National Library of China

"Ascending the throne nearly a century after the demise of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the emperors of which were members of China's majority Han ethnic group, Qianlong the young Manchu emperor still felt the need to proclaim his legitimacy, by associating himself with works that marry China's age-old painting tradition to which he was utterly devoted, with the teachings of Confucianism," says Wu.

She was alluding to Qianlong's reassembling of largely-dispersed works by Ma Hezhi from the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279). A court painter, Ma spent a sizable part of his career bent over *Shi Jing*-related works under the royal edict of Emperor Gaozong, under whose reign a weakened Song Dynasty moved its capital from North China to today's Hangzhou city in the south. This was a teetering empire that had lost large chunks of land to, and had two emperors held captive by, the rival Jin Dynasty (1115-1234), the founders of which were genealogically linked to Qianlong's ancestors.

The fact that *Shi Jing* has 305 pieces and that Ma was required to paint them all meant that his artistic legacy was secured — even more so due to the impassioned efforts of Emperor Qianlong who ordered, four years into his reign in 1739, that paintings should be made depicting the works in the *Shi Jing* collection "based on the brushwork of Ma Hezhi". Each and every one of these paintings was accompanied by calligraphic works showcasing the book's original texts — composed by both the emperor himself and those whose brushmanship he appreciated. (Today, these works are part of the collections of the Palace Museum in Beijing and its counterpart in Taiwan.)

The effort went on for a whole six years, at the end of which, the emperor only found renewed passion to commission another mini-project: eight painted scrolls correlating with the eight stanzas of the poem *July*.

Among these different renditions is one that captures the gist of the poem — the longest of all folk poem-songs contained in *Shi Jing*. It starts with two stargazers in the far right corner, continues with some plowing and the picking of mulberry leaves, before ending with a refined scene of gentlemen gathering under a thatched roof.

If the gentlemen, enjoying tea and one another's company while being entertained by musicians, represent ancient China's literati class — educated members of the society who filled the bureaucracy, then the foremost of the two stargazers — the other, standing behind, was clearly his attendant — may be the embodiment of the man who sits above that bureaucracy: the emperor himself. The resemblance between this particular painting and one by Ma is striking to say the least.

"He's looking at one particular star — the Fire Star — whose westward shift of position in the sky was typically seen as the transition between the summer and autumn. Although winter was still months ahead, that's when people were expected to prepare for it. The ruler would be more concerned than anyone else if he were to find contentment in seeing his people 'going up to the hall and raising the buffalo-horn cup'," says Wu, quoting from the poem's last stanza.

More than ink-play

Where the Southern Song emperors had failed to live up to their artistic image as the prescient rulers and able protectors, Qianlong believed he had succeeded. Dismissing the *Shi Jing* pictures produced during the Song era as "mere self-entertaining ink-play", he viewed the creations of his time — many of which were indeed copies of those Song efforts — as mirroring the power and prestige of his empire and himself. In that sense, they have less to do with self-scrutiny and more with self-congratulation, something Confucius had intended to discourage among those who breathed rarefied air, reminding them of the endless toil of lesser mortals.

"Once the harvesting is done, alas! We're sent to work in the lord's house then," goes one line of the poem.

In 1279, in a final act of defiance, 8-year-old Zhao Bing, the last emperor of the Southern Song Dynasty, jumped off a cliff into raging sea on the back of his chancellor. China entered the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), ruled by the Mongols.

However, being ruthless with their conquests doesn't mean that the Mongol rulers relied purely on force to exert their authority. In fact, the contrary was often true. According to Wu, Buyantu Khan, the fourth emperor of the Yuan Dynasty, once asked Zhao Mengfu, renowned painter-calligrapher and direct descent of the Song royal family, to make a painting depicting *July* for the crown prince who later succeeded him.

"Without a cultural and political mandate, even a mighty Mongol ruler would have felt inadequate," says Wu. "This is not to mention the fact that some of highly-detailed versions of the *July* paintings also functioned as picture books for aristocratic youth who were otherwise out of touch with the described way of existence."

"Why not study *Shi Jing*?" Confucius once prompted. "If it allows personal expression and communion with kindred souls, perception of the world around you and parody of it whenever one's tempted to do so ..."

Abound with explicit and implicit metaphors and comparisons, the latter deemed a safer way to offer political commentary without imperiling oneself, *Shi Jing* lies at the origin of a fond practice of the Chinese literati class, whereby messages harsh and bitter were couched in seemingly harmless lines. (The bemoaning of a mistreated wife could well be the lamentations of a moral person banished by a senseless king and his corrupt court.)

This unique aspect of *Shi Jing* partly explains why it is one of the most-annotated books in Chinese history: people argued over whether there was an allegorical meaning behind a particular sentence and what it was, sometimes even at the book's own expense.

One example concerns the last line of the second stanza of *July*, the verbatim translation of which would be "Sadness the (mulberry-leaf picking) girls' heart stored, afraid they are to go home with the lord". In more recent history, it has been interpreted as the deploring of a peasant girl in the face of unwanted attention from a member of the aristocracy.

But is that so? "To me this is highly unlikely, given the whole context of the poem and the lightheartedness that permeates the preceding part," says Wang Yimin, senior researcher from Beijing's Palace Museum. "The 'sadness' here is better understood as a stroking sense of melancholy, harbored by a forlorn lady, whose thoughts became restless on a warm spring day."

"But of course *Shi Jing* is always open to interpretation. Perhaps the best way to approach it is to see it as what it is: a collection of folk poem-songs, with its signature ways of narration and a down-to-earth humor that may or may not always live up to sophisticated reading. Yet it's deeply rooted in people's experience — the source of its ageless beauty and allure," Wang says.

One man who wouldn't have agreed more is Xu, who in 2014 was bestowed with the highest honor of the International Federation of Translators. Engaging himself with that same line, the man went for grace.

"They (the young ladies) are in gloomy mood," he wrote. "For they will say adieu to maidenhood."

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LIFE

More than 20 young players perform in a concert held in Beijing, showcasing the results of a training session to promote the Pinghu style of *pipa* playing among a younger generation of musicians, on May 10. PHOTOS BY XING WEN / CHINA DAILY

Strings of opportunity

Training course helps popularize and expand the horizons of lesser-taught style of *pipa* performance among younger players, **Xing Wen** reports.

Within the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing, the sound of *pipa* (a four-stringed lute) alternates between commanding grandeur and delicate elegance, resonating with the listeners present.

Beyond the walls, amid the lush greenery of a vibrant early summer forest, the melodies intertwine with the rustling leaves, creating a harmonious symphony of nature and music.

The recent concert showcased the results of a training session to promote the Pinghu style of *pipa* playing among a younger generation of musicians.

Throughout the long course of history, China's *pipa* playing has given rise to four prominent styles, namely, Pinghu, Pudong, Chongming and Wang, according to Zhang Hongyan, director of the Traditional Chinese Instruments Department at the Central Conservatory of Music.

Presently, the styles of Pudong, Chongming and Wang are passed down as essential components of the music curriculum in academic institutions. However, the Pinghu school, an important style of *pipa* performance, is currently grappling with the challenge of having insufficient successors to uphold its esteemed heritage.

The training session, sponsored by Beijing Culture and Arts Fund, invited established *pipa* players and composers to instruct a group of young musicians and music teachers in the Pinghu style.

"The training session focused on promoting the Pinghu style of *pipa* playing among teachers, who we selected from esteemed universities across the country," says Zhang, also the initiator of the training session.

She notes that it is only by integrating the time-honored *pipa*-playing style into the teaching systems of these academic institutions can the Pinghu style's legacy be truly promoted and elevated.

Around two decades ago, Zhang, who learned to play the *pipa* as a child, harbored a question. "Given the significance of the Pinghu style, from whom should I learn it?"

Fortunately, several years ago, Zhang heard about *pipa* player Li Jianzheng, who was the senior disciple of Yang Shaoyi (1913-74), the seventh-generation successor of the Pinghu style. Determined, Zhang decided to pay Li, who lives in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, a visit.

> "The training session focused on promoting the Pinghu style of *pipa* playing among teachers, who we selected from esteemed universities across the country."
>
> **Zhang Hongyan,** director of the Traditional Chinese Instruments Department at the Central Conservatory of Music

Yang Yi, a teacher at Tianjin Music College, does a solo performance at the concert held in the Forbidden City Concert Hall.

"Li offered his heartfelt welcome to me, saying 'I have been eagerly awaiting your arrival', which truly touched me," Zhang recalls.

She assisted Li in publishing a musical score, which is a compilation of traditional Pinghu-style *pipa* music taught by Yang.

Li added clear and comprehensible instructions to the ancient scores, making it easier for contemporary musicians to learn and carry on the legacy, while preserving the essence of the original compositions.

Zhang discovered that most disciples of the Pinghu style are already in their 80s. These elderly individuals were facing health issues, such as rheumatism, affecting their fingers, or hearing impairment.

"However, when they taught their students, they did so with remarkable dedication," Zhang says. "With just a stroke of the strings, they could produce something pure and profoundly antique."

Zhang increasingly felt the urgency of preserving and passing on this particular style.

In order to ensure the continuity of the Pinghu style, the one-month training program, which took place between April and May, invited teachers, particularly those with relevant lineage, to learn the style and to, in turn, impart their knowledge to a larger group of students.

The training session provided a rich array of activities, including lectures by renowned composers, master classes by musicians of the Pinghu style and concerts.

Li Luo, an associate professor at the Zhejiang Conservatory of Music, was among the participants of the training program.

With the Pinghu style having its roots in Zhejiang province, Li Luo feels a deep sense of responsibility to learn and uphold the traditions of this esteemed form.

"The knowledge and performance techniques I have learned here, rooted in the cultural heritage of the Pinghu style, have nourished me. They will definitely have a subtle but profound influence on my future performances," he says.

As a young *pipa* musician, Li Luo goes beyond traditional learning and actively seeks innovation. He has been exploring ways to enhance the expressive capabilities of *pipa* playing onstage, aiming to attract a wider audience.

At an upcoming concert in July, Li Luo says he will experiment with using the *pipa* to interpret different themes depicted in the works of French painter Claude Monet, a pioneer of impressionist painting, presenting a beautiful fusion of music and visual art.

Engaging in the study of the Pinghu style has led Yang Yi, a teacher at Tianjin Music College, the affiliated middle school of Tianjin Conservatory of Music, to contemplate her personal musical journey and the importance of self-exploration.

"Previously, my focus during performances was mainly on the audience's reaction, but now I prioritize self-reflection and introspection, delving into my own inner world," she says.

She has been involved in music education at the foundational stage, teaching senior middle school students for the past 20 years.

Her teaching philosophy has undergone some changes as well.

"Initially, I placed greater emphasis on demanding technical proficiency from my students, but now I prioritize their learning of traditional culture and the enrichment of their aesthetic ideas," she says.

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Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

A group photo of all the training session's participants, including Pinghu-style *pipa*-playing inheritors and young players. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Rare mountain leopards on the increase

YINCHUAN — Guo Zhihong, an official at the Liupan Mountain nature reserve bureau in Northwest China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region, has been busy lately, collecting photos and videos of leopards roaming in the mountains.

High-tech automatic infrared cameras strategically placed in locations believed to be frequently visited by the elusive cats capture the images by skillfully tracking their footprints.

"Leopards are the most beautiful animals I have ever seen. Every time I get a picture of one, I can hardly contain my excitement," says the 43-year-old Guo, who has worked at the nature reserve for 24 years.

There are few leopards on Liupan Mountain, with an estimated population in the area of only approximately 30. As an endangered species, this breed of leopard, known as the North China Leopard, is under first-class national protection in China.

Guo and his colleagues are currently working with a team from the School of Life Sciences, Fudan University in Shanghai, as well as a scientific education institution in Chongqing, on a research project aimed at better protection for the cats.

"We have so far identified 21 individual leopards. Each of them has different streak patterns, which serve as their identification cards," says Wang Fang, a researcher at the School of Life Sciences, Fudan University.

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> **Wang Fang,** a researcher at Fudan University

Videos of the leopards showed that males patrolled their territories regularly while marking their presence by applying a distinctive musk to the surrounding objects to establish clear boundaries. Female leopards held their cubs gently in their mouths as they moved around the area. Some leopard cubs were seen playing in the snow.

"All this video footage shows that the leopards are not migrating. Instead, they have chosen to establish a stable breeding population in the area," Wang says.

Situated on the fringes of the North China Leopard's population distribution area, Liupan Mountain holds immense significance for these magnificent creatures, as in the face of climate change and intensive human activities, this mountainous region provides a vital refuge. With the restoration of the surrounding ecology, Liupan Mountain will become a key channel for the leopard population to expand, according to Wang.

"As an apex carnivore, the leopard is an iconic part of an intact and healthy ecosystem, as it requires a large number of herbivores to support its survival," says Song Dazhao, a researcher from Chongqing, adding that the return of leopards to a given location is an important sign of ecological improvement.

With forest coverage exceeding 66 percent, compared with 27 percent in the 1950s, Liupan Mountain stands out as a remarkable testament to Ningxia's determined efforts to restore barren lands through reforestation.

XINHUA

LIFE

From left: Carrying her brother Meng Xuanpeng, 10-year-old Meng Rouyu negotiates some steps in July 2012; Meng Rouyu, now 21, still keeps a watchful eye on her 12-year-old brother.

From left: Leading a group of children, Meng Lidan, 8, crosses a mountain path on her way to school in 2012; the 12th-grader attending a ceremony at the Dahua County Senior High School last month.

From left: Wearing his sister's used clothes, Meng Xuanhong (left), then 4 years old, plays with his friend Lan Xiaoshuai, in July 2012; on the same stretch of road, now paved, in January 2021, the two seventh-graders from Nongyong village, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, are now chasing their dreams instead of tires.

PUPILS SCALE NEW HEIGHTS

Photos by **HUANG XIAOBANG** and **HU XINGYU** | *Xinhua*

Meng Lidan will sit the national college entrance exam this month, with a view to becoming a teacher in her village, Nongyong, once one of the most impoverished areas in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

She wants to enrich the minds of children and help them understand how education can transform their lives.

In 2012, Meng and her classmates at Nongyong Primary School grabbed national headlines when photos of them climbing makeshift ladders and scaling a 10-meter cliff in Nongyong village, Dahua Yao autonomous county, Hechi, Guangxi, on their way home from school, were published.

In 2014, a tunnel was built through the cliff to connect the village to Nongyong Primary School. A dormitory was also built at the school.

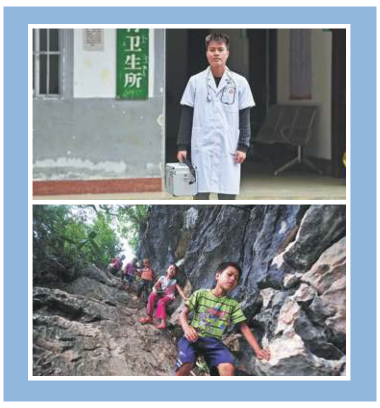
Over the past decade, Dahua county has seen tremendous changes. Investing 830 million yuan ($116.94 million), Dahua authorities have built and renovated more than 1,500 roads, enabling access to every village in the mountainous region. In recent years, the local government has allocated funds and resources to improve the living environment via a variety of measures, including settlement relocation, renovation of dilapidated buildings and road construction.

Meanwhile, Meng and her former classmates have entered an exciting time in their lives, as new opportunities beckon.

Some have gone on to higher education, while others have taken jobs in big cities. Several have chosen to return to the village.

Their experiences show how much life has changed as a result of the country's poverty alleviation and rural vitalization programs.

From top: Meng Ligu studies in the Dahua County No 2 Middle School last month; then 7-year-old Ligu (front), along with her classmates, carefully makes her way to school in September 2012.



From top: Graduating from medical school in 2021, Meng Fusong became a doctor in Nonglei village, Guangxi; the then 10-year-old Fusong (front) negotiates a rocky path on his way to school in May 2012.

From left: Seven-year-old Meng Wangbing (second from left) at Nongyong Primary School in July 2012; Meng on a visit home during winter vacation from Guilin University of Technology in Yunnan province.

From left: Lan Tiande (sitting, right), then 7, negotiates a makeshift ladder on his way to school in September 2012; now 18, vocational school student Lan at home during this year's Spring Festival.*